REINVENTING HOLLYWOOD

How 1940s Filmmakers Changed Movie Storytelling

David Bordwell

VISIT…

REINVENTING HOLLYWOOD

REINVENTING

HOW 1940S FILMMAKERS CHANGED MOVIE STORYTELLING

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
Chicago and London

HOLLYWOOD

David Bordwell

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637
The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London
© 2017 by The University of Chicago
All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations in critical articles and reviews. For more information, contact the University of Chicago Press, 1427 E. 60th St., Chicago, IL 60637.
Published 2017
Printed in the United States of America

26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 1 2 3 4 5

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-48775-5 (cloth)
ISBN-13: 978-0-226-48789-2 (e-book)
DOI: 10.7208/chicago/9780226487892.001.0001

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Bordwell, David, author.
Title: Reinventing Hollywood : how 1940s filmmakers changed movie storytelling / David Bordwell.
Description: Chicago ; London : The University of Chicago Press, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2017001123 | ISBN 9780226487755 (cloth : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780226487892 (e-book)
Subjects: LCSH: Motion pictures—California—Los Angeles—History—20th century. | Narration (Rhetoric). | Motion pictures—California—Los Angeles—Plots, themes, etc.
Classification: LCC PN1993.5.U65 B654 2017 | DDC 384/.80979494—dc23 LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017001123

♾ This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).

For Marjorie Jones Bordwell (1922–2001)
and Jay Wesley Bordwell (1923–81)

It is not enough just to tell an interesting story. Half the battle depends on *how* you tell the story. As a matter of fact, the most important half depends on how you tell the story.

DARRYL F. ZANUCK, 1947

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION The Way Hollywood Told It 1

CHAPTER 1 The Frenzy of Five Fat Years 18

INTERLUDE: SPRING 1940: LESSONS FROM *OUR TOWN* 56

CHAPTER 2 Time and Time Again 67

INTERLUDE: KITTY AND LYDIA, JULIA AND NANCY 102

CHAPTER 3 Plots: The Menu 124

INTERLUDE: SCHEMA AND REVISION, BETWEEN ROUNDS 154

CHAPTER 4 Slices, Strands, and Chunks 162

INTERLUDE: MANKIEWICZ: MODULARITY AND POLYPHONY 182

CHAPTER 5 What They Didn't Know Was 199

INTERLUDE: IDENTITY THIEVES AND TANGLED NETWORKS 228

CHAPTER 6 Voices out of the Dark 237

INTERLUDE: REMAKING MIDDLEBROW MODERNISM 261

CHAPTER 7 Into the Depths 273

CHAPTER 8 Call It Psychology 297

INTERLUDE: INNOVATION BY MISADVENTURE 327

CHAPTER 9 From the Naked City to Bedford Falls 341

CHAPTER 10 I Love a Mystery 372

INTERLUDE: STURGES, OR SHOWING THE PUPPET STRINGS 404

CHAPTER 11 Artifice in Excelsis 416

INTERLUDE: HITCHCOCK AND WELLES: THE LESSONS OF THE MASTERS 440

CONCLUSION The Way Hollywood Keeps Telling It 462

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 481

NOTES 483

INDEX 537

INTRODUCTION

The Way Hollywood Told It

> The history of an art is the history of its masters; it is not a history of its bunglers. If the movies were judged with similar criteria we would understand why the historians of the year 2000 may well write: "In the 1940s, Hollywood experienced a renaissance."
>
> Leo Rosten, 1941[1]

ALFRED HITCHCOCK ONCE CLAIMED HE DIDN'T SEE MANY movies. An executive was puzzled. "Then where do you get your ideas?"[2]

The anecdote seems to typify pure Hollywood superficiality: recycling formulas ad nauseam, no attempts at true originality. Yet Hitchcock could have answered, "From silent films, particularly American and German and Russian ones, and from British thriller novels." And his remark wasn't altogether candid; he keenly followed the work of other directors. After all, not even a Hitchcock movie comes from nothing. Deliberately or unwittingly, filmmakers are indebted to their forebears and their contemporaries.

Hollywood in the 1940s was a vast storytelling ecosystem, bursting with compulsive energy. Films of many sorts blossomed. Story ideas, some grown in Hollywood soil, some transplanted from adjacent media, were cultivated in the studio hothouses.

Forms were generated, repeated, swiped, tweaked, parodied, pounded flat, turned inside out. Catchy ideas might suddenly seem old hat, and moribund ones might be brought back to life. The central idea of this book is that this turbulent process of repetition and variation worked to the benefit of cinematic art.

Fans and critics have long recognized the special flavor of films from this time. *Citizen Kane*, *Rebecca*, *Casablanca*, *Fantasia*, and dozens of film noirs and crazy comedies and Gothic melodramas stand as prototypes of forties cinema. They are perennials of cable television and archive restorations. Cinephiles rightly celebrate the brilliant stars, the ripe production values, the lustrous cinematography and soaring scores. But we're also responding to the films' adroit storytelling strategies.

Sometimes the plot is offbeat, with confused heroes, duplicitous heroines, or curious premises (say, visits from beyond the grave). Just as striking, as the Zanuck epigraph at the start of this book indicates, the *how* of movie narrative becomes as important as the *what*. We find dead narrators and multiple flashbacks and surprise voice-overs and bizarre dream sequences. Many of these techniques can be found piecemeal in earlier eras, but in the 1940s they became common, prominent, and unexpectedly varied. Narrative options crystallized in ways that gave American films a new complexity and power. The richest of these movies are dense, through-composed, endlessly revealing. And far from being decorations or gimmicks, their storytelling strategies can profoundly shape our experience.

The results are most palpable in moments that continue to grip us. Here are some that work on me: The urbane murmur of a bon vivant over darkness ("I shall never forget the weekend Laura died . . ."); in *Shadow of a Doubt*, young Charlie's discovery, in a small-town public library, of the damning article her uncle has torn from the family newspaper; the final chapter of *Meet Me in St. Louis*, with a title card labeled simply and radiantly "Spring"; the boy in *How Green Was My Valley* cradling his father in his arms as the voice of the man he will become assures us, "Men like my father can never die"; the conclusion of *The Human Comedy* showing a dead father quietly bringing his dead son to revisit their family; in *On the Town*, three sailors singing and dashing across

Manhattan landmarks as a digital clock readout unwinds beneath them; George Bailey of *It's a Wonderful Life* discovering a mean-spirited alternative future for his town of Bedford Falls; in *Double Indemnity*, an insurance man, bloody cigarette dangling from his lip, talking into a tape recorder ("I didn't get the money and I didn't get the woman"); Mildred Pierce stepping out of darkness to find her husband embracing her daughter; and enormous lips gasping "Rosebud"—two syllables that launch an exhumation of a man's past. However much the films owe to tradition, nothing in earlier American cinema quite prepares us for the galvanic tingle yielded by these and a hundred other moments.

Seen with historical detachment, they stand as sharply etched emblems of forties Hollywood, a period when bold storytelling techniques were deployed with an eager, sometimes reckless energy. In both masterpieces and unheralded programmers, through ballyhoo and quiet accumulation, narrative innovations went mainstream. Once there, they shaped what contemporaries and successors could do. They would persist for decades. Today, they're probably most visible in the work of Christopher Nolan, Quentin Tarantino, Joel and Ethan Coen, Paul Thomas Anderson, and other ambitious filmmakers, but in quieter form they pervade our run-of-the-megaplex fare as well. The forties gave us basic tools of modern movie storytelling.

DON'T FORGET AMNESIA

What distinctive narrative strategies emerged in the 1940s? Where did they come from? How did various filmmakers use them? How did the innovations change the look and sound of films?

Obvious as they are, these questions haven't been asked, let alone answered in a systematic way. Most books on Hollywood at this period concentrate on particular filmmakers, films, or genres. My compass is wider. I consider individual feature films as a repository of creative decisions, alternative pathways through a maze of storytelling options. Probably the nearest kin to *Reinventing Hollywood* are those studies of the conventions governing English playwriting in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[3]

Alternatively, many studies of the forties treat the films as reflections of American moods and mentalities. Wartime cinema is said to embody public anxieties about democracy, while postwar cinema purportedly reflects widespread concerns about the Cold War, the atomic age, and prospects for the future in a Washington-led imperium. Films of many sorts are interpreted as overt propaganda or as concealed expressions of social doubts and dislocations.[4]

This is not that sort of book either. For one thing, I'm asking questions about the development of narrative techniques, and propaganda chiefly involves explicit messages, the what rather than the how. Authorities monitoring scripts in the Office of War Information weren't concerned with flashbacks or inner monologues as such: the targets were situations, dialogue, character traits, and professions of ideology. Even then, there were continuing clashes between policy directives and Hollywood entertainment values.[5] One writer has pointed out that popular culture comfortably absorbed new wartime content into its longstanding conventions.[6]

What about treating the films as exposing deeper-seated public attitudes? I believe such interpretations usually don't stand up to scrutiny. Reading films as reflecting national character, a zeitgeist, a "cultural imaginary," or the mood of a moment seems questionable. Such interpretations rely on assumptions about what factors cause things to appear in films, and those assumptions haven't been plausibly supported.[7] We'd need independent evidence of some macro quality (national character, mood, pervasive psychological states) and a sense of how widely it's shared. Then we'd need a causal story of how that quality comes to manifest itself in motion pictures. No such evidence and no such stories have been forthcoming.[8]

The reflectionist line of interpretation is itself largely a product of the 1940s, when Siegfried Kracauer and other social critics undertook the task of reading national character or mood from current films.[9] James Agee provided a vigorous objection:

> It seems a grave mistake to take [movies] as evidence as definitive, as from-the-public, as if 40 million people had actually

> dreamed them. Take the far simpler case of advertising art. The American family, as shown therein, is not only not *The* Family; it isn't even what the American people imagines as *The* family. It is A's guess at that, subject to the guesswork of his boss, which is subject in turn to the guesswork of the client. At best, a queer, interesting, possible approximation, but certainly never definitive. In movies many more people take part in the guesswork, but not enough to represent a population: and many more accidents and irrelevant rules and laws deflect and distort the image. A movie does not grow out of The People; it is imposed on the people—as careful as possible a guess as to what they want. Moreover, the relative popularity or failure of a picture, though it means something, does not at all necessarily mean it has made a dream come true. It means, usually, just that something has been successfully imposed.[10]

Do films perform cultural and political work? Absolutely. But to track that, along with the aesthetic effects the films have, I think the best starting point is the institutional activity of the film industry and its decision makers, along the lines Agee sketches. Filmmakers make educated guesses about what will grab audiences. When they're successful, they can't say with assurance why, though like critics filmmakers will sometimes invoke the zeitgeist.[11]

If we want to understand continuity and change in film history, it's useful to assume that cultural attitudes, memes, sticky ideas, and the like serve as *materials* for movie making. They're selected and sculpted by filmmakers and the pressures of cinematic tradition. They're modified by context. As in other art forms, filmmakers swipe cultural elements and submit them to the demands of their craft.

Take amnesia. With so many forties characters suffering from it, we're tempted to interpret their plight as reflecting wider forces. One critic proposes that films featuring amnesia (like movies about angels and ghosts) were the culture's way of offering solace to those who lost loved ones.[12] A more academic critic might suggest that broader anxieties within American society led to a fascination with "a loss of cultural memory." But exactly

how the US population, 130 million strong, induced Hollywood to make such movies is never explained.

There's no disputing that a great many 1940s Hollywood films involve amnesia—over seventy, by one count. But we can find over sixty amnesia-driven releases in the 1910s, about fifty in the 1920s, and at least forty in the 1930s.[13] Amnesia is rare in real life but common in movies.[14]

And not only movies. It's a treasured plot resource throughout the world's literature. Clinicians may deplore the fact that creative writers almost never represent amnesia accurately,[15] but fictional versions answer to narrative demands, which often care little about realism. Movie amnesia is only one step above the "magic forgetting" we find in folk tales. Folklorists have compiled catalogs of amnesia motifs, such as "forgotten fiancées" and "forgetting by stumbling."[16] Great authors from Homer and Shakespeare to Dickens and Balzac have had recourse to amnesia, and it has been a common device for modern writers, high and low.[17] The river Lethe, the lotus fields of the *Odyssey*, the laudanum that causes memory loss in *The Moonstone*, the problems plaguing the protagonist of *Memento* (1999)—across the ages, memory breakdowns afford storytellers a wide range of creative options.

I suggest we be cold-blooded and take amnesia not as a symptom of audience anxieties but as a reliable narrative device. News of battle injuries and home front breakdowns offered forties filmmakers a realistic alibi for stories of memory loss. Whatever sympathies a screenwriter may have had for wounded vets or tormented housewives, craft conventions made amnesia an attractive option.

For instance, stories demand gaps in knowledge. One way to spread fruitful ignorance is to create characters who don't recognize themselves, or who can't recall things they've done, or who can't remember their loved ones. Amnesia generates curiosity (What has made X forget?) and suspense (Who will X turn out to be?). Amnesia can justify flashbacks and can cover time gaps later to be revealed as important (*Calling Dr. Death*, 1943). A lost identity can create dramatic crises, as when the protagonist in *Random Harvest* (1942) finds that for years he has led a double life.

Amnesia can also generate changes in character. *Sullivan's Travels* (1942) shows a befuddled film director sentenced to a chain gang. Had he remembered who he was, he would not have learned about life at the bottom of society.

As a momentary device, amnesia can prolong situations and trigger humor or tension. As a more basic premise, it can turn an entire plot into a search. In *Identity Unknown* (1945) an amnesiac pilot tries to find himself by tracking down the families of all the buddies lost on his mission and asking, by cruel elimination, if anyone recognizes him. Amnesia can be contagious too. The most florid case in *Love Letters* (1945) strikes a young wife because of a traumatic murder, but forgetting haunts other characters as well.

Filmmakers were well aware of using the ailment opportunistically. "Coming up," wrote a columnist, "is another picture about amnesia, a common malady these days."[18] A review criticized *Street of Memories* (1940) for adhering to "the outdated amnesia formula."[19] The pressure was on filmmakers to freshen up this old device, and several did. *Love Letters*, noted *Variety*'s reviewer, "employs such plot oldies as the Cyrano de Bergerac and the amnesia adventure as foundation, but develops a pattern of gripping interest from them."[20] In *I Love You Again* (1941) a prissy small-town Rotarian, conked on the head, realizes he's had amnesia for nine years. He was originally a slick con man, and now, coming home, he must pretend to still be the hick he temporarily was. *I Love You Again* was praised for finding a new twist on the cliché.[21]

This isn't to say that movies' version of amnesia is sheer plot contrivance. Lost memory has its own appeals. It's fun to think about. It generates sympathy for its victim and raises thematic questions about what is stable in personal identity. Through the device of amnesia, films can conjure up serious concerns about returning veterans. From the standpoint of craft demands, though, 1940s social conditions can be used to realistically motivate this conventional device. Throughout this book, what might be taken for passive reflections of a zeitgeist can better be seen as filmmakers' fitting bits of immediate actuality to narrative needs.

SMOOTH, FAST-MOVING, EFFORTLESS—AND NEW BESIDES

I've spoken of how the Hollywood tradition submits common topics and themes to narrative pressure. What might that tradition be?

Back in the 1920s, writers began to argue that Hollywood had created a vivacious art form that fully earned its name, "moving pictures." Gilbert Seldes, in his influential book *The Seven Lively Arts* (1924) argued that lowbrow mass entertainments had a spontaneous energy that genteel fiction, poetry, and theater lacked. On the screen, fine as Griffith and DeMille were, it was Mack Sennett's slapstick comedies, with pratfalls and careening chases, that best fulfilled cinema as an art of movement: "Everything capable of motion set into motion."[22]

From this standpoint, the coming of sound could only seem a setback. Movies became more dialogue-driven, even stiffly theatrical. Seldes claimed, though, that Hollywood regained its footing in the mid-1930s. The gangster films in particular had achieved "the perfection of the silent movies with dialogue superimposed."[23] Talkies had recovered a distinctive cinematic pace through merging vigorous action with terse conversation. Critic Otis Ferguson celebrated the crisp, thrusting rhythm of comedies, social dramas, and adventure films.

> If there is any one thing that the movie people seem to have learned in the last few years, it is the art of taking some material—any material, it may be sound, it may be junky—and working it up until the final result is smooth, fast-moving, effortless. . . . Whoever started the thing in the first place, Hollywood has it now, and Hollywood speaks a different language.[24]

The key, Seldes noted, was not the story itself but "the way the story is told, which is by movement."[25]

That movement need not be extreme, as F. Scott Fitzgerald pointed out in his unfinished novel *The Love of the Last Tycoon*. In one scene, studio boss Monroe Stahr explains to a snobbish writer from the East how to grab the viewer's interest. Stahr sketches a scene: A young woman hurries into an office and furtively burns a

pair of black gloves. The phone rings, and when she answers she says she's never owned a pair of black gloves. Now Stahr reveals that there's a man already in the office watching her.

The hypothetical sketch isn't a virtuosic visual turn like a Keaton gag. It depends on a situation that's articulated in a bit of dialogue, a few hand props, and simple bits of business. No fights or pratfalls here, yet the action summons up curiosity, suspense, and surprise. Stahr's eastern writer is intrigued. "Go on. What happens?" "I don't know," says the tycoon. "I was just making pictures."[26]

Fitzgerald had worked on screenplays, and like his peers he was aware of the power of visually grounded narrative. In 1937 Frances Marion, a distinguished MGM screenwriter, published a how-to manual that explained everything from double plotlines and character arcs to trick transitions and swift pacing.[27] A year earlier, the journalist Tamar Lane had written a discerning book about the new technique of sound pictures. Lane surveyed a host of creative options, including plot twists, montages, and clever exposition.[28] Clearly, filmmakers of the mid-1930s were confident that sound could be assimilated into their tradition of pictorial storytelling.

We can think of that tradition as a vast set of collective solutions to basic problems: controlling exposition, picking out protagonists, building up drama, sustaining suspense, and so on. By the end of the 1930s, several other collective problems had been solved. Sound technology was improving immensely. Multichannel recording was established, microphones had became more sensitive, and fine-grain print stock began to be used during recording, mixing, and printing for final release.[29] Filmmakers had also created a new genre, the musical, and major variants—the revue, the backstage story, the musical as a romantic comedy with songs—had been mapped out.

Thanks to both dramaturgy and technology, then, most 1930s films preserved the fluidity of 1920s storytelling. The action was usually presented chronologically and objectively, and the characters were typically fixed, consistent, and transparent in their traits and motives. Accordingly, the narration was reliable. Except in the case of mysteries, the viewer could take what was shown at

I.1. The silent version of *The Last Warning* (1929) provides a grab bag of outré narrative devices. This over-the-top tale of a haunted theater exploits flashbacks, hallucinatory visions, and replayed scenes. When a woman finds her face dripping with cobwebs . . .

I.2. . . . we are given her optical viewpoint. In the thirties, this pictorial gag would have been unlikely; we would simply have been asked to enjoy the comedy of her discomfiture.

face value. The stability of this storytelling system was later celebrated by critic André Bazin, who maintained that studio narrative technique had reached a point of perfection by 1938–39.[30]

In creating this stability, though, filmmakers tended to iron out aspects of 1920s cinema that Seldes and Ferguson had played down. Silent filmmakers had pioneered some flamboyant storytelling techniques. Many 1920s films resorted to self-conscious devices, and some flaunted them to an extreme degree (figs. I.1 and I.2). Such straying into stylization was mostly suppressed after the coming of sound. True, talkies continued to employ the montage sequence, a string of rather abstract images portraying a place or summing up a process (train trip, business success, changing seasons).[31] But most 1930s scenes relied on the sharp, sober presentation of dialogue and behavior exemplified in Monroe Stahr's phone-call intrigue.

Making pictures, as Fitzgerald's mogul conceived it, was what Hollywood had learned how to do. But too much repetition wasn't good for business. Along with stability came a steady pressure toward novelty. As happens in any period, some filmmakers sought to be original in a noteworthy way.

What new things might be accomplished in the 1940s? Well, filmmakers could consolidate and expand certain options already developed. Thirties screwball comedy could be sustained

in *Ball of Fire* (1942), *The Major and the Minor* (1942), and other pictures. The A-level Western, exemplified by *Stagecoach* (1939) and *Dodge City* (1939), became the "super-Western" of *Duel in the Sun* (1947) and *Red River* (1948).[32] Opulent costume dramas and turn-of-the-century Americana persisted through the decade. In the face of slumping box office in the late forties and early fifties, biblical spectacle was revived in *Samson and Delilah* (1950), *David and Bathsheba* (1951), and *Quo Vadis* (1951). Comedy teams like Abbott and Costello and Hope and Crosby recalled the heyday of the Marx Brothers but brought their own sensibilities to the genre.[33] New trends in all areas should be encouraged, noted one commentator: "Without such pictures, there would be no progress in picture making, no competition in picture making, and no fun in it at all."[34]

Forties musicals epitomize the urge for constant, expansive novelty. Some musicals took on a populist or nostalgic tenor (*Meet Me in St. Louis*, 1944; *State Fair*, 1945), while others benefited from merging conventions with the biopic (*Yankee Doodle Dandy*, 1943; *Night and Day*, 1946).[35] Production values became more flamboyant thanks to rich Technicolor, bigger budgets, and ambitious special effects.[36] Esther Williams's aquatic spectacles, the banana ballet of *The Gang's All Here* (1941), the sailors' urban adventures in *On the Town* (1949), and Fred Astaire's pipecleaner body stretching in slow motion in *Easter Parade* (1948) made even the excesses of 1930s musicals look staid. Still, these sequences had their roots in earlier song-and-dance extravaganzas. Astaire's signature special-effects cadenzas, for instance, were ambitious revisions of his "Bojangles of Harlem" number in *Swing Time* (1936).

Beyond revamping older traditions, filmmakers could push some boundaries. Could movies become sexier? Yes. The Breen Office, the industry's censorship agency, was letting its guard down, and David O. Selznick, Preston Sturges, and Howard Hughes, among many others, found ways to heat up the screen. And could movies tackle social problems like racism and anti-Semitism? Yes. A wave of "message pictures" garnered prestige and box office revenues.[37] "Exploitation pictures," once relegated to Poverty Row, went upmarket as studios based combat pic-

tures, spy films, and crime movies on the day's headlines.[38] *The Lost Weekend* (1945), *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), *Naked City* (1948), *Home of the Brave* (1949), and other films were rewarded for risky themes and more adult attitudes.[39]

Most films in these genres and cycles display Ferguson's "smooth, fast-moving, effortless" technique. Yet the forties demand for movies, almost any movies, yielded an opportunity to experiment with narrative as well. In conditions that favored risk taking, some filmmakers tried revising the storytelling conventions they inherited. That meant, in many cases, returning to possibilities sketched in the 1920s—greater subjectivity, playing with time and viewpoint, a willingness to create highly stylized narration. And revival led to revision. Filmmakers, recognizing the new demands of sound cinema, could develop those tendencies in ways unavailable to silent movies.

Exploration and variation come with the territory. A filmmaker deploying any technique is forced to choose among fine-grained options. If you opt for flashbacks, will they be memories or testimony? Will they be anchored in a single character, or will they provide different characters' perspectives on a situation? Will the flashbacks be fully informative about past events, or will they leave out crucial items—to be provided, perhaps, by other flashbacks? Will the flashbacks be arranged chronologically or shuffled out of order? If you choose a voice-over, will it be subjective, flowing inside a character's mind? Or is it more detached, recounted by the character at a later time? Or might the voice-over issue from an external narrator? Will it hold back information we need to follow the action? Apart from forced choices, there's the need for novelty. After many filmmakers have embraced one option, how can the next film distinguish itself?

Which is to say that many forties filmmakers constantly set themselves fresh creative problems. This effort, I hope to show, made filmic storytelling rich, complex, and engaging. By consolidating new narrative norms, filmmakers encouraged further innovations. It's this flowering of forms that partially explains the "thickening" we sense in forties classics, their demand that we rewatch and discuss them.

Bazin thought the turn of the decade marked the beginning

of a new cinema style, on display in the deep-focus, long-take works of Orson Welles and William Wyler. It was the beginning of something else as well. From 1939 onward, collective efforts at narrative innovation wound up recasting the entire Hollywood tradition. That process is the subject of this book.

THE REPETITION OF FORMS

The pages that follow are a gloss on this remark by screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière:

> The makers of films, who are themselves viewers of films made by others, have a rough idea of whether or not they will be understood by their contemporaries. The latter, for their part, adapt (unwittingly, often unconsciously) to forms of expression which briefly seem daring but quickly become commonplace. . . . It was through the repetition of forms, through daily contact with all kinds of audiences, that the language took shape and branched out.[40]

Carrière drives home the point that film artists feed off the films around them. In their search for novelty filmmakers strive to build stories that are at once fresh and comprehensible. That search creates its own logic of imitation and variation—a branching out of competing creative options.

It's time to explain my periodization, which runs from 1939 to 1952. Changes in any art need not march in lockstep with the calendar or with social and political history. Based on the questions I'm asking about narrative form, it's untenable to fit developments snugly to the war years or the postwar period. Many of the trends I'm plotting emerge at the very end of the 1930s, and they do, I think, become fairly routine by 1953. Still, I'll be considering occasional pre-1939 examples, usually as one-off efforts. More extensively, I'll be suggesting that these creative choices enjoyed a long life from the 1950s on. What happens in the forties doesn't stay in the forties.

Another point about dating involves the films. The date I assign to a title is its year of release as listed in *The American Film*

Institute Catalog.[41] This careful compendium identifies, as best evidence indicates, when films were made, premiered, and released. Sometimes the public saw a film years after it was finished. *Arsenic and Old Lace* was completed in late 1941 but was withheld while the play remained a hit on Broadway. According to the *Catalog*, the film didn't premiere until September 1, 1944, and it went into general release later that month. Accordingly, I date it as a 1944 movie. Occasionally a film will premiere in November or December but not go into release until early the following year, so my date won't match that in other sources. The most outrageous example is *Gone with the Wind*, which had several premieres in late 1939 but went into general release in January 1940. Like everybody else I think of it as a 1939 movie, but for the sake of dogged consistency I tag it as a 1940 film.

Leo Rosten's expectation of a 1940s renaissance can find support in the pages that follow, but quality isn't my sole concern. I discuss many masters and masterpieces, but these stand out from a background of common practices. Andrew Sarris suggests that in appraising the forties we should "concentrate on the top people, accept occasional dividends from the 'intermediates' and forget about the dregs."[42] I don't dwell on many dregs, but some have slipped into my catchment area. I think we best appreciate the complexity and richness I've mentioned by seeing what these qualities owe to conventions on display in films at many levels of achievement. Sarris is interested in the poetry of auteurs; I'm interested in the poetics of Hollywood.

That aim isn't utterly new for me. Earlier work, particularly my contributions to *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, tried to demonstrate the continuity of the studio tradition from its origins to recent times while tracing industrial and aesthetic circumstances that sustained that continuity. This book pursues a somewhat different question. Moving down a level of generality, I explore how, at one period, the flexible framework of that tradition fostered fresh strategies of storytelling. Again, we'll see that the process relied on the mutual interaction of business practices and artistic creativity.

Finally, a map of the book. After an overview of the forties filmmaking community, chapter 1 suggests some ways to think

about innovation in studio cinema and the adjacent arts. One of the most powerful innovations involved playing with story chronology, so that strategy launches my investigation in chapter 2. The following chapter surveys some basic plotting options, with emphasis on the role of protagonists. Chapter 4 then analyzes principles of ensemble plotting, block construction, and other unusual options.

The next four chapters consider broad principles of narration, the patterned flow of story information. I analyze restriction and ellipses (chapter 5), voice-over and character narrators (chapter 6), optical and mental subjectivity (chapter 7), and the deeper subjectivity of dreams and hallucinations (chapter 8).

Having considered techniques of plotting and narration, I look at three broad trends that encouraged innovative storytelling. Chapter 9 traces the push toward quasi-documentary realism and the complementary rise of fantasy. The new importance of mysteries and thrillers is the subject of chapter 10, and chapter 11 considers the trend toward self-conscious artifice (reflexivity, if you insist). A conclusion considers the legacy of the period 1939–52 for later filmmaking, and not just in America.

The bulk of the book ransacks hundreds of films for evidence and examples. The wide compass of the main chapters has left little space for closer analysis of individual films. Since a depth sounding can be as persuasive as generalizations, between most chapters I've sandwiched brief probes of one or a few films, and in three instances I've focused on the work of innovative directors.

These interludes operate as hinges; they usually pick up points from the previous chapter and anticipate ideas in the next one. They enrich my argument, I think, by showing how some filmmakers wove the finer texture of their films. The forties innovations in plotting and narration shaped the design of images, the succession of shots, the filigree of performance, the tonalities of the sound track. Although this book isn't predominantly about film style (1940s visual and auditory techniques deserve books of their own), the craft and cunning of the period's storytelling is as evident in small things as in big ones.

To give a sense of the finer texture of the films, *Reinventing Hollywood* occasionally draws on frames taken from the films. In

addition, I have put some extracts from particular scenes online at http://www.davidbordwell.net/books/reinventing.php. When a scene I mention is among those extracts, an endnote also signals it. Other clips and commentary relevant to the book's argument are gathered at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/category/1940s-hollywood, in the blog I coauthor with Kristin Thompson.

In the course of all this, I'll consider cooperative competition, popular culture as variorum, the special rules needed for supernatural tales, and the breadcrumb trail encouraged by flashback stories. I'll broach matters of block construction and multiple-protagonist plotting. We'll see the new role filmmakers assigned to mystery, and we'll consider how the industry generated its own historiography. In all, I hope to offer some fresh ways to think about Hollywood's vast experiment in collective storytelling.

The 1940s were an era of tremendous creative ferment across the American arts. Novelists Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, J. D. Salinger, Carson McCullers, and Gore Vidal launched their careers. The theater was rejuvenated at one extreme by the psychological dramas of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, and at the other by exuberant musicals in the wake of *Oklahoma!* In music, serial composition and the experiments of John Cage ran alongside the flowering of big-band swing, the emergence of bebop, and the consolidation of country music. Abstract Expressionism became a definitive contribution to postwar modern painting.

Still, you could make the case that Hollywood film was America's greatest contribution to world art in the 1940s. I believe this, but I'm biased. This cinema was my introduction to film. It was my parents' cinema (they met during World War II), but I claimed it as mine. I grew up watching forties classics on black-and-white television. From my childhood through to my retirement years, *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *His Girl Friday* and *The Best Years of Our Lives* and *Notorious* and *How Green Was My Valley* and *Meet Me in St. Louis* and dozens of other films from the era have been my touchstones for Hollywood at its finest. They still give me goosebumps of delight.

Evidently I'm not alone. Forties films have lived on for de-

cades and have sunk into the consciousness of millions of viewers. Filmmakers from Jean-Luc Godard and Rainer Werner Fassbinder to Steven Spielberg and Christopher Nolan and Terence Davies have paid tribute to the cinema of this period. I hope to show, in the very last chapter, that the look and feel of today's cinema, whether mainstream or relentlessly quirky, are indebted to the ways forties filmmakers reinvented the Hollywood tradition.

Since deciding to write this book, I've watched scores of films previously unknown to me. Many of them are what Sarris would call dregs. Yet I persist in believing that American cinema of this era was an extraordinary artistic achievement—a machine for producing pleasure on a scale the world had never seen before. And a good part of that pleasure stemmed from a thrusting, occasionally demented urge for novelty at almost any price.

CHAPTER 1

The Frenzy of Five Fat Years

The best things come, as a general thing, from the talents that are members of a group; every man works better when he has companions working in the same line and yielding to the stimulus of suggestion, compassion, emulation.

Henry James[1]

IN THE SUMMER OF 1942, RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL SCREENED *Mrs. Miniver* before its general release. An average film played at Radio City for two weeks; this one played for ten. Across five shows a day, the film drew crowds we can scarcely imagine today. The theater, the world's largest, had a capacity of 6,200. By the end of the run, 1.5 million tickets had been sold. The movie could have played longer, but the management had to move it aside for a new attraction, *Bambi*.[2]

Of course *Mrs. Miniver* is an exceptional case. Six months after America's entry into the war, audiences were keen to see a drama of the British home front. Critics' reviews were ecstatic, and the film proved successful throughout the country. Still, the record attendance—which was said to have returned half of the film's production cost—can stand as an emblem of the sheer power of Hollywood cinema in the 1940s. For a few years the industry knew an unprecedented stretch of success before plunging into a decline that would persist for decades. And the good years, sus-

tained by a public for whom moviegoing was both routine and special, would enable filmmakers to recast cinematic storytelling.

FILM FRENZY

The industry had weathered some tough years during the Great Depression, when attendance and profits dropped. Some studios narrowly avoided closure. Yet the system remained robust. MGM, Paramount, 20th Century–Fox, Warner Bros., and RKO not only produced films but owned theater chains. The "Big Five" controlled a mere fraction of US screens, but they held nearly all the important ones. The biggest first-run houses, which had thousands of seats and were immense real-estate assets, served as shop windows for the studios' products.[3]

The pace of production ensured a regular flow to the audience, but no single studio's output could fill America's seventeen thousand screens. Double bills ("duals") were common, and some programs changed two or three times a week. In exhibition the Big Five cooperated by booking their rivals' products. Since the studios' theater chains tended to group regionally, the affiliated theaters in any area could play the top films from all the studios. Columbia, Universal, and United Artists (the "Little Three" companies) owned no screens, so they had to work with the big firms' exhibition branches while finding independent theaters to show their products. Still smaller outfits, such as the Poverty Row companies, usually catered to remote houses and the bottom slots of later-run duals.

The Majors (understood at the time as the Big Five plus the Little Three) exploited their power ruthlessly.[4] Independent theater chains might be forced to "block-book" a studio's entire annual output sight unseen. In the late 1930s government anti-monopoly intervention forced the Big Five to book in smaller blocks and to schedule trade screenings so exhibitors could see what they were buying. Yet not until the 1948 Supreme Court decision on the Justice Department's "Paramount Case" were the Big Five forced to divest themselves of their theaters.

By then the industry had seen steep ups and downs. At the end of the 1930s, the studios had just spent many millions upgrading

their facilities. In 1940 film grosses, which had already been declining, fell off sharply. Attendance dropped, and the European war made Britain the only significant foreign market.

Soon, though, a huge boom began. The annual domestic audience grew from 3.5 billion in 1941 to 4.7 billion in 1946. In this world without television and the Internet, as many as 90 million movie tickets might be sold each week. (Today's totals are about a third of that, for a population nearly three times as large.) Studio profits leaped from $19.1 million in 1940 to nearly $120 million in 1946. The *Mrs. Miniver* blowout was only one symptom of a new surge in moviegoing.[5]

The period 1942 through 1946 might be called the Five Fat Years. America's shift to a war economy in the late 1930s had begun to dispel the Depression. After Pearl Harbor, thanks to six-day workweeks and plenty of overtime, people had cash to spend. "You could sell anything you got," recalled a grocer. "It just walked off the shelves."[6] As consumer goods from bicycles to razor blades were rationed, movies benefited. "The working public," a trade paper noted, "is finding that food, clothes, liquor, and entertainment are just about the only outlets it has for its money. . . . This is turning money into the box office from people who've not been in a movie house for years."[7]

The appetite seemed boundless. In the centers of war production, factories ran around the clock, and so did theaters, with "swing-shift matinees" starting at 1:00 or 2:00 a.m. Frank Capra recalled one manager's telling him, "No matter what crap is playing, all you have to do is open the doors and duck."[8] The programs offered one or two features, shorts, a newsreel, a cartoon, trailers, and often live entertainment in the form of musical numbers, comedians, and vaudeville acts.

Outside the theater, Americans bumped into Hollywood at every turn. Fan magazines fed the appetites of thirty-five million readers a month, and more than twice that number read Hollywood hype in newspapers.[9] The studios cross-promoted their films with other industries, putting stars of recent releases in magazine ads for cigarettes or toothpaste. In radio, the most popular medium of the era, the studios had already secured a foothold through investment. Versions of popular films were broadcast on

Lux Radio Theatre and other showcases. Some films became radio series.[10] Dozens of radio performers moved to the big screen in the late 1930s and early 1940s, from Alan Ladd and Jack Benny to Don Ameche and, most successfully, Bob Hope.

The Majors hit on several ways to sustain the excitement. The main decision: Don't make more movies, make bigger and splashier ones. Studios began to trim their slates of B films, the sixty- to seventy-minute fillers for double bills. The cutback was partly due to government rationing of raw film stock, but it was also strategic. Exhibitors rented B films for a flat fee, while A pictures yielded the studios a percentage of the box office. In addition, A pictures played the top theaters, with higher admission prices. With A films as the stronger investment, the studios filled them with the biggest stars, whose pay rose accordingly. Standard for a first-tier star was $110,000 to $150,000 per picture (minimally $1.5 million in 2016 currency). For *Notorious* (1946), Cary Grant earned the equivalent of $7 million today.

For several years the A-picture strategy yielded bigger grosses. Before 1945, only twenty-five films had taken in $4 million or more. In 1945 alone, nineteen films did.[11] The intermediate pictures, the "in-betweeners" or "nervous As," got inflated as well, by adding a star or filming in color. The movie fever fed on older blockbusters too, as studios discovered when reissues of *King Kong* and *Snow White* captured handsome revenues.[12] Columbia, Universal, and Republic upped their game, investing in As and becoming more profitable along the way. And with the flood of viewers, the theaters controlled by the Big Five garnered a share of all studios' successes.

There were also more "specials," exceptionally expensive projects. In 1939 a $1.5 million budget was rare, but a few years later it was common, and $3 to $4 million budgets weren't unknown.[13] To recoup costs, a special was likely to be "road showed," playing at fewer sessions per day and with top ticket prices before going into first-run release. For an ordinary A picture the studio might claim 30 to 40 percent of the box office, but the road shows of *Gone with the Wind* (1940) and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1943) returned an astonishing 70 percent to their distributors.[14]

An A film took longer to make than a B, but that didn't slacken

the pace of work. Actors worked six-day weeks, and many would finish a film on Saturday and start a new one on Monday. A performer might play in six or eight films a year. Actors on double duty might commute between sound stages or studios. Robert Mitchum and Janet Leigh recalled making three movies at the same time.[15] Not all the results were released immediately, though. Because runs were extended to meet demand, nearly every year the studios had some films on the shelf.

Yet nobody was complaining. Although some films lost money, producers acted as if every film were a potential hit. Darryl F. Zanuck of 20th Century–Fox summed it up in deciding to do *Jane Eyre* (1943): "The picture will do business, and because business is phenomenal, it will recoup its cost."[16]

To increase the must-see factor, studios acquired best-selling novels and popular Broadway plays. Retail book sales boomed in the 1940s, accelerated by the arrival of cheap paperbacks, while Broadway had thunderously successful seasons thanks to the war economy. Slick-paper magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post*, with circulation in the millions, also provided pretested material. The hunger for stories brought even pulp writers into the studios.[17] Steve Fisher's *I Wake Up Screaming* sold to Fox for $7,500 in 1940; by 1946 he was a successful screenwriter and got $50,000 for another novel.[18]

The bidding went higher and higher. Margaret Mitchell's $50,000 payday for *Gone with the Wind* began to look paltry.[19] Warner Bros. bought Irving Berlin's musical *This Is the Army* for $250,000, and Fox paid $300,000 for the now-forgotten combat play *The Eve of St. Mark*.[20] Later in the decade *Annie Get Your Gun* commanded $650,000.[21] Studios invested in Broadway shows like *Life with Father* and *I Remember Mama* to get a jump on movie rights.[22] Iconic authors James Hilton and Erich Maria Remarque supplemented six-figure sales with guaranteed percentages of box office revenues.[23] Producers hired novelists to write books to be adapted, with MGM financing competitions for aspiring novelists.[24] By 1944 75 percent of the Majors' releases were adaptations, and the most prestigious ones ruled critics' ten-best lists, the top-grossing lists, and the Academy Award nominations.[25]

The crash came with changing consumption patterns. As the

war wound down after 1945, commodity prices shot up without commensurate wage hikes, so workers spent more on food, clothing, and durables. Demobilized soldiers returned, started families, and moved to the suburbs. Mortgages, autos, appliances, and television sets squeezed moviegoing out of budgets. In 1947 profits plunged, and in 1948 so did admissions. By 1952, ticket sales had fallen 45 percent from the 1946-47 peak, and over 3,000 theaters had closed.

Moviemaking wasn't the only business that was staggering. Most entertainment industries, from nightclubs and record companies to concerts and legitimate theater, saw a sharp postwar downturn.[26] But for Hollywood the pressure was particularly keen. While the domestic market waned, the foreign market remained largely frozen, and $20 million worth of literary and stage properties had to be dumped, swapped, or sold off at a loss.[27] The audience dropoff created shorter runs, which led exhibitors to demand more releases—at a moment when making pictures had become very expensive. In 1942 the average movie cost about $350,000; a decade later it cost $1.1 million. Meanwhile, television emerged as a key competitor. By the early 1950s TV stations were broadcasting dozens of old studio pictures each day.

Most dramatically, in 1948 the Justice Department won its anti-monopoly case, and the Big Five slowly began to divest themselves of theaters. They lost their guaranteed showcases and the revenues flowing from them. Divestment reinforced the A-picture strategy because now every film needed to be promoted singly; there were no more packages including weaker titles.[28] Exhibitors demanded blockbusters in order to compete with foreign releases and with television.[29]

In the studios, cost cutting was the order of the day. The Majors reduced shooting schedules and let contracts lapse. Half of contracted screenwriters in 1945 were freelance in 1948, and half of craft workers were dismissed over about the same period.[30] Many stars, realizing they could drive harder bargains on their own, had already left the studios. Purchases of top plays and novels fell off, since original screenplays were cheaper. B films, now often made by independent producers with studio distribution deals, returned to fill dual programs.

The late forties didn't witness an utter collapse. Two of the top box office successes of the decade were *The Jolson Story* (1947) and *Samson and Delilah* (1949). And the trend toward drive-in theaters somewhat offset the loss of "hardtop" screens. Yet day by day things were sagging, and Hollywood's lean years would stretch on for decades.[31]

The year 1953, producer Dore Schary reflected, marked "the beginning of the end of the big studio system."[32] But the pressures favoring innovation begun during the boom years didn't abate. The need to sell pictures singly encouraged original work, such as the cycle of social problem films. Given studios' need to streamline production, more filmmakers became hyphenates, with writer-directors, writer-producers, and producer-directors gaining greater creative authority. Some of America's most original and provocative movies were made as the studios' fortunes declined.

SOURCES OF INNOVATION

The stability of the system owed a good deal to disciplined production. A studio would employ several executive producers, each overseeing a batch of projects. Those were assigned to writers, directors, technicians, and staff, most of them under long-term contract. Developing the script might take weeks, months, or years, but shooting was comparatively brief—typically from eighteen days for program pictures to three months for big releases. Filming started at 9:00 a.m. and ended at 6:00 p.m., but actors came in much earlier for makeup; they often worked twelve-hour days. Rehearsals were rare, though actors might rehearse informally while lighting was being set. The director was expected to cover two to four pages of script a day, and representatives of the producer submitted daily progress reports. Postproduction—editing, scoring, sound work—might take another two or three months.[33]

From acquisition of the story to final release, an A picture typically took a year to eighteen months.[34] Accordingly, every studio had many projects in different stages of preparation. Every spring the studio head and his executives would settle on a set of releases for the upcoming season, which started in September. This

sturdy routine allowed the eight principal studios to produce over four thousand features between 1939 and 1952. Hundreds more were released by Poverty Row and independent outfits.

Because the system was so routinized, it's sometimes compared to assembly-line output in a factory. That's plainly a mistake. The product wasn't uniform; no two movies were as alike as two cars rolling out of the Ford plant at River Rouge. Moreover, the process was quite flexible. Scripts were rewritten or passed among many hands. Failures of casting or differences of temperament could force major changes. On A pictures, the director would typically work with the writer to reshape story and dialogue. Things might be changed again on the set; powerful directors like Howard Hawks and Leo McCarey could let actors improvise, and Hitchcock could turn a deaf ear to a producer's pleas. The film could be further adjusted in postproduction, with scenes reshot, sound redubbed, and editing shaped by the producer or studio head, often long after the director had departed.

To this mode of production corresponded norms of style and storytelling. Principles of characterization and plot construction that grew up in the 1910s and 1920s were reaffirmed in the early sound era. Across the same period there emerged a clear-cut menu of choices pertaining to staging, shooting, and cutting scenes. In sum, American mass-market filmmaking created a distinct cinematic tradition.[35]

Instead of an assembly line, then, a closer analogy would be painters' ateliers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There teams of specialists contributed their bits to paintings designed and overseen by master artists and guided by the demands of patrons. Another comparison would be to putting on an original Broadway show, in which script, physical production, performances, and overall concept are malleable from the first table reading to opening night and even after. In both instances, everyone's work is governed by shared protocols of subject matter, genre, and style. The comparative looseness of moviemaking, typical of show business generally, had long given film workers a chance to reshape their products at many stages.

Since those products couldn't be identical, variety was built into the system. Economic standardization demanded prod-

uct differentiation, which meant aesthetic variation. The wiggle room in the production process made formal innovation possible, and in the forties that process was especially energetic. Why?

The guaranteed audience provided a solid foundation. The focus on A pictures, the expanded budgets, the rise in salaries, and the tonier sources helped. So too did a waning of censorship. The Hays Code, stiffened in 1930, was still in place, but more filmmakers were learning to evade it, and studio heads sometimes ignored the Breen Office's requests for changes. Onscreen violence and sexual suggestion increased dramatically.[36] "Unfilmable" books like *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Forever Amber* made it to the screen. By the end of the decade, *My Foolish Heart* (1949) could have the heroine headed for divorce without a new man in sight. The women-in-prison picture *Caged* (1950) could imply that the heroine would become a hooker, while in *Francis* (1950) the talking mule could lament that he would never raise a family.

There's also some evidence of foreign influences. British and French films could be seen in New York and Los Angeles during the 1930s. Hitchcock's thrillers were particular favorites. The dark French crime dramas *Crime et châtiment* (1935), *L'alibi* (1937), and *Le jour se lève* (1939) got American release, and the last was remade as *The Long Night* (1947).[37] Writer-director Sacha Guitry won acclaim for his experimental bent.[38] In *The Story of a Cheat* (1936), Guitry's voice-over played all the roles, while *Pearls of the Crown* (1937) traced the circulation of royal pearls across historical periods. Several of Guitry's techniques would surface in 1940s Hollywood.

In the war years and thereafter, imported British films reinforced comparable formal options. Noël Coward's *In Which We Serve* (1942), influenced by *Citizen Kane* and hailed as one of the greatest pictures ever made, confirmed the dramatic power of voice-over narration, parallel flashbacks, and temporal overlaps. Other Coward films, including the family saga *This Happy Breed* (1944) and the suave ghost comedy *Blithe Spirit* (1945), chimed with American trends. Likewise, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger deftly worked with the autobiographical flashback (*The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, 1943) and the afterlife drama

(*A Matter of Life and Death*, aka *Stairway to Heaven*, 1946). At a time when England was America's biggest foreign market, there seems to have been a dialogue between Hollywood filmmakers and their British counterparts.

Crucial to the innovations of the war and postwar years was the greater power given to ambitious talents. A few months before the war, William Wyler negotiated a contract allowing him one picture a year for Samuel Goldwyn and one or two for other studios. (The outside project for 1942 was MGM's *Mrs. Miniver*.)[39] Other writers, directors, and producers who could steer A pictures gained greater creative authority. Writers and directors were starting to serve as producers.[40] Stars could occasionally become directors, as Robert Montgomery and Ida Lupino did. Writers too became hyphenates, with Preston Sturges, Billy Wilder, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, John Huston, and Delmer Daves starting to direct their own screenplays.

Some of this new talent was resolutely intellectual and inclined to experiment. Sturges, Mankiewicz, and Albert Lewin had been working in Hollywood as writers and producers throughout the thirties. The opportunity to direct encouraged them to create dense, formally ambitious works. As for newcomer Orson Welles, he and his collaborators felt no compunction about thickening *Citizen Kane* with subtle references and half-hidden motifs. Susan, forced to embark on a singing career, trains on "Una voce poco fa," a lament from a woman held captive by an older man ("I let myself be ruled . . ."). Welles included what fans now call an Easter egg by slipping the snow globe into inconspicuous spots during *Kane*'s flashbacks.

Producers won greater creative control too. Independent David O. Selznick brought Hitchcock to America and, somewhat erratically, micromanaged some of the forties' most important pictures. Samuel Goldwyn and smaller independents, overseeing less grandiose operations, were able to hire freelance A directors such as Sam Wood, Fritz Lang, and René Clair.[41] The independents were on the whole "dependents" because they relied on studios' facilities and distribution machinery. The studios demanded stiff terms, but in the boom years the rewards were worth it.[42] Universal, for instance, became a significant studio by

supporting producers Mark Hellinger, Jack Skirball, and Walter Wanger. Probably the most successful "semi-independent" producer of the period was Hal Wallis, who had been production head at Warners on *Casablanca* (1942) and other top pictures. Moving to Paramount, he arranged an in-house deal and began building a stable of stars, including Burt Lancaster, Kirk Douglas, and Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis.

High taxes on salaries drove stars and other creative personnel to set up independent outfits, where income would be taxed as capital gains. The results were meager, and many of these companies collapsed after only a few pictures. The most prestigious director company, Liberty Films, founded by Capra, Wyler, and George Stevens, quickly fell apart. But the wave of independent production created consequential films, including *It's a Wonderful Life* (1947), *Rope* (1948), works by Fritz Lang and Max Ophüls, and a throng of offbeat Bs. It also gave writers and directors the incentive to try new things, as we'll see throughout the chapters that follow.

Both the studios and the quasi-independent companies benefited from a flood of new talent. Writers came from the pulps, from the slicks, from best-sellerdom and Broadway. A 1939 *Variety* article pleaded, "Need Fresh Pix Directors," and they weren't long in arriving.[43] Some worked their way up the studio hierarchy, others came from the stage or radio. The forties roster of newcomers included Edward Dymtryk, Elia Kazan, Joseph H. Lewis, Vincente Minnelli, Preston Sturges, John Sturges, Delmer Daves, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Vincent Sherman, Robert Wise, Mark Robson, Richard Fleischer, Samuel Fuller, Jules Dassin, Jean Negulesco, Don Siegel, Phil Karlson, Abraham Polonsky, Ted Tetzlaff, Anthony Mann, Irving Reis, George Sidney, and Orson Welles. Émigrés like Lang and Clair were already working in Hollywood, and they were followed by Douglas Sirk, Robert Siodmak, Otto Preminger, Jean Renoir, Julien Duvivier, Zoltan Korda, Alfred Hitchcock, Curtis Bernhardt, Anatole Litvak, Fred Zinnemann, and Billy Wilder.[44] A great many directors who started in the forties would enjoy rich careers for thirty years.

Fresh talent brought new storytelling ideas into circumstances that encouraged innovation. And alongside the studio

system there flourished a social network that facilitated the rapid exchange—borrowing, swiping, call it what you will—of ideas and personnel.

COOPERATIVE COMPETITION

Although nearly 34,000 people were said to be involved in American film production at the end of the 1930s, Hollywood counted itself a small town.[45] The top creative workers formed a tight community. In 1940, the eight principal companies had under contract about 600 actors, 114 directors, and 340 writers.[46] Even adding in agents, producers, extras, and the employees toiling on Poverty Row, the top echelon formed not so much a small town as a hamlet. Somewhat insulated from both the Depression and the impact of the war, the filmmakers could cultivate a vibrant social network.

Nepotism was no stranger to the system, of course. Pals and relatives and hangers-on might be hired out of loyalty or helped out with funds. William Goetz left Fox to form another company, International, thanks to a million-dollar investment from his father-in-law, MGM's Louis B. Mayer.[47] MGM's head costume designer, known simply as Irene, was married to the brother of Cedric Gibbons, the studio's top art director. Sometimes the personal threads became quite tangled, as when director Charles Vidor married actor Evelyn Keyes, who soon married John Huston (after his affair with Olivia de Havilland). Vidor then married Doris Warner LeRoy, Harry Warner's daughter and ex-wife of director Mervyn LeRoy.[48]

Pillow talk aside, the Hollywood social network was sustained by the studios. Yet it sometimes outran their control and fostered unpredictable creativity. That took the shape of what we might call cooperative competition.

The community thrived on competition. Producers jockeyed for favor under the production head, and they cultivated their pet stars. Actors feuded with their rivals and fought to get showcase parts, while directors struggled to rise in the pecking order.[49] The studios and the unions kept young artisans under the thumb of old-timers with more seniority.

There was purely aesthetic competition as well. Directors competed to make elaborate tracking shots or long takes. A new stunt or special effect constituted a challenge; when DeMille saw a spectacular horse fall in *Virginia City* (1940), he vowed to surpass it in *North West Mounted Police* (1940).[50] A fresh narrative idea could constitute a trade secret. Once Selznick decided to make *Rebecca* (1940) a "first-person" film, he admonished Hitchcock, "If we do anything along these lines we should keep it secret and try to be the first with this technique."[51] The screenplay for *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) bore the label "top secret."[52] But secrets weren't easy to keep. The trade papers had snoops planted in the studios, and rival studios sent minions into sneak previews to report on audience response.

Yet because the studios were forced to advance common interests, there was considerable cooperation. In exhibition, the Big Five's theaters eagerly played their rivals' top films. The equivalent in production was the loanout. A studio could offer a technician or contract player to another firm in exchange for money (usually the salary plus a fee, pocketed by the studio). Selznick maintained his company's cash flow by loaning out his stars, directors, and directors of photography. Or there might be a trade. In order to get Gary Cooper for *Sergeant York*, Warners gave Bette Davis to Goldwyn for *The Little Foxes*.

The Big Five were producing fewer films in the 1940s, so loanouts helped keep actors busy. Hitchcock resented the money Selznick was making off him, but some actors welcomed opportunities for greater exposure and more experience. There were always sharp-elbowed negotiations, but all parties recognized, as one Universal executive put it, that trading talent was "necessary for the lifeblood of the industry."[53]

Much the same dynamic operated when people left studios, as nearly all Warners' 1930s directors did, or when powerful stars or directors went freelance or formed their own production companies. The seven-year option contract was a symbol of actors' servitude, but work arrangements became more flexible in the forties, and cross-pollination across studio lines was more common. Production was moving toward a more porous, open market where personnel flowed from studio to studio.

Cooperation crossed company lines in other realms. Studios sold each other stories and scripts. The craft unions pulled together artisans from many studios, and knowledge was often pooled to the benefit of all. The American Society of Cinematographers held meetings to exhibit new camera and lighting techniques. The ASC journal, *American Cinematographer*, freely shared trade practices, as when a special-effects wizard explained how he achieved the dazzling images of *The Invisible Man* (1934).[54] Another institution, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, established pan-studio committees for disseminating standards and best practices. The Big Five and Little Three could cooperate on broad initiatives such as standardizing technology and initiating public campaigns like the one in 1938 trumpeting the slogan "Motion Pictures Are Your Best Entertainment."[55] Agents' careers depended on cordial relations with executives and talent, creating what one historian has called "a symbolic syndicate" alongside the more rigid silo structure of the firms.[56]

Within the studios, cooperation went beyond the minimal demands of work. So many veterans recalled having fun that we can't simply put the feeling down to nostalgia. "It was exciting," George Sidney remarked, "because there was a lot of young talent, and we were all moving and pushing and shoving."[57] "There was a great spirit of camaraderie," recalled Vincent Sherman of Warners in the early 1940s.[58] Commissary lunch tables tended to be hierarchical, with one for directors, one for producers, and so on. But by eating with other Warners screenwriters Sherman quickly formed friendships that made collaboration easier.[59]

Stanley Donen remarked that "in one sense you were thrown together with a lot of marvelous people, and in another sense you were in a sort of war. . . . There were a lot of people in there struggling to beat you."[60] Orson Welles recalls collaborative competition in the lunchroom:

> Instead of going back to their little place up in the Hollywood hills to write their scripts, they had to eat with each other every day in the studio commissary, which made for a competitive situation. It was collegial—"What are you working on?"—and they

shared funny stories about how dumb the producer was, how bad the director was, and all that. But they didn't want their peers to do better than they did, so they worked hard.[61]

A more informal social network was just as vibrant. Actors George Macready and Vincent Price partnered in an art gallery. Ralph Bellamy went to football games with Columbia boss Harry Cohn. People met for tennis, horse racing, and polo. They gathered at parties—Ethel Barrymore's upper-crust dinners, George Cukor's more casual Saturday night affairs and his Sunday buffets for his gay circle, Sam Spiegel's gin-rummy nights, Joe May's swimming-pool parties for German exiles. With the arrival of the war, dutiful attendance at the Hollywood Canteen was as important as an appearance at swanky restaurants like Romanoff's. At "Ken Murray's Blackouts," a vaudeville program that ran for over seven years, stars came up from the audience to perform impromptu.

The most high-powered fraternizing involved gambling. Selznick, Jack Warner, Jack Conway, Mervyn LeRoy, and Irving Berlin met often over cards. One biographer suggests that Warner traded Bette Davis for Gary Cooper because he owed Goldwyn over $400,000.[62] "If you don't play poker in Hollywood," complained director William Dieterle, "well, poor fellow, because that's where the pictures are cast and the deals made."[63]

This dynamic social network made it easy to see the movies made by the competition. Executives would be expected at the company's gala premieres and would often attend other studios' previews. Producer Dore Schary attended eighty previews a year, while "at home I viewed at least two pictures from other companies each week."[64] Zanuck, after working until midnight on his projects, would then screen a movie. Some film folk were genuine fans. Beginning director Arthur Lubin watched films voraciously, studying some over and over.[65] Writer Charles Brackett crammed his diaries with accounts of films seen in premieres and revivals. A film society presenting silent classics attracted Gene Kelly and Olivia de Havilland.[66]

Not only were stars loaned out, so were prints. For their home screening rooms, executives could borrow or rent films from any

firm.[67] Studios opened their vaults to rival screenwriters and directors. At Paramount Brackett and Wilder were able to watch Columbia's *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) "to check on certain similar situations" in a current project.[68] Editing *All the King's Men* (1950), Robert Rossen studied *The Roaring Twenties* (1939) as a model of driving pace.[69] Selznick ordered his staff to borrow a print of *Daughters Courageous* from Warners so they could admire the Monterey location footage, and when he brought Hitchcock to America, he wrote to a staff member,

> I think it would be a good idea for Mr. Hitchcock and Mr. Lewton [then a Selznick employee] to study the thrillers, chillers, and mystery stories that Fox might have available—both those on the list they supplied us and also any they may not have put on the list.[70]

Cooperative competition was business as usual.

The mix of industrial discipline, rivalry, and informal exchange was evident in the routines of screenwriting. Typically the studio would purchase a property or an original story and then assign a writer to produce a synopsis. The producer would discuss it with a writer, then at a story conference other decision makers would offer suggestions. A writer would be assigned to prepare the treatment, a novella-like piece running about fifty pages. More story conferences would be followed by script drafts, with more notes from producers. At any point other writers might be brought in, either as replacements or as specialists. There were dialogue men, situation men, gagmen, continuity men, polish-job men. "It was like laying linoleum," said Dorothy Parker, "different people working on different little squares."[71] Eventually a shooting script would crystallize, but even that was subject to revision during filming and postproduction.

All this activity took place under varying degrees of strictness. Warners writers punched a time clock, but Fox and MGM writers had flexible hours, and Paramount let some writers work at home. No matter how relaxed the atmosphere, though, competition was inevitable. In the 1930s, writers might not know that others were assigned to the same project; after the 1942 Writers

Guild contract they had to be told, but only if they asked. A writer who was replaced was likely to feel that the work was ruined by later hands, or by dumb ideas from the executives, or by the strictures of the Breen Office. Writers had to fight to get screen credit, which was the basis of their contract renewal. Often the last writer to recast a script wound up with credit, regardless of others' contributions.

Yet the competition often yielded cooperation. Directors and producers collaborated with writers they found congenial. Writers could team up and create a brand identity. Top pairings were Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder, Garson Kanin and Ruth Gordon, and Melvin Frank and Norman Panama. Lesser teams worked on B pictures and in-betweeners. Writers might help each other with story problems behind the scenes. With most A pictures derived from plays and fiction, writers could approach the task as artisans. Screenwriter Walter Reisch recalled, "It wasn't their own stories which they had to defend, to improve upon, or to polish. They had detachment. It just worked like a beautiful Swiss clock, the whole MGM machinery."[72]

One sign of the communal effort is the in-joke. Paramount didn't mind plugging a Fox hit by ending *Rhubarb* (1950) with a gag showing Paul Douglas watching kittens parading past his park bench: "What a cat! A litter from three wives." Audiences would get this reference, as they would catch the mention by Cary Grant, in *His Girl Friday* (1940), that his rival, played by Ralph Bellamy, looks like Ralph Bellamy. Preston Sturges's movies plugged his earlier films and mocked his own studio. Forties pictures, especially those featuring Bing Crosby and Bob Hope, teem with references to Hollywood figures, most notably James Petrillo, hardheaded boss of the musicians' union.

But some gags seem aimed at movieland's inner circle. Later in *His Girl Friday*, when Grant's character boasts of having disposed of one Archie Leach, few ordinary viewers would recognize Grant's original name. The somber drama *The Long Night* (1947) can spare an offhand reminder of an earlier comedy featuring the film's star.[73] Orson Welles named a psychiatrist in a radio show Herman J. Mankiewicz, the co-screenwriter of *Citizen Kane* (1941).[74] Brackett and Wilder had had run-ins with Charles Boyer

on a picture, so studio mavens would appreciate the moment in *The Major and the Minor* (1942) when a magazine boasts an article by Boyer, "Why I Hate Women." Producer-director Albert Lewin said he made *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945) for six friends.[75]

I don't want to paint too cozy a picture of the studios' world. Actors and crews often had to put in twelve-hour stints and come in on Sundays, the bosses paid off gangsters to keep labor peace, the mob had a hand in virtually every business, and big players routinely abused their powers in both petty and grandiose ways. Racism was endemic, and women were treated as commodities. Bosses often truckled to censors and politicos.

Alongside corruption and backstabbing, however, cinema flourished. The wiggle room in the system shows that mechanical-industrial analogies don't fit Hollywood moviemaking. It was not a factory but a vast workshop; not an assembly line but a quasi-artisanal process that absorbed distinctive talents and rendered every product, good or bad, unique. Compromises, rethinks, and accidents happy or disastrous were the order of the day. In day-by-day craft choices, cooperative competition fostered both narrative innovations and rapid reworking of them.

The collective nature of the Hollywood enterprise yielded remarkable achievements, and the results were never perfectly controllable or predictable. When collective effort was blended with individual abilities and fresh opportunities, new forms—not formulas—could emerge, expand, and mingle. We're confronted with two levels of artistry: tried-and-true conventions executed with more or less skill, and innovations that open up new possibilities.

Where do the innovations come from? Two primary sources, I think: other films and other media.

IN DEFENSE OF THE SWITCHEROO

The cocky ensign Hallam Scott, a movie star turned navy pilot, is stunned when his roommate Gus Chisholm is killed during a Japanese air attack. Scott is now packing up Gus's belongings. He tosses a squashed toothpaste tube into the wastebasket (figs. 1.1 and 1.2). Hesitating, he picks it out and puts it among the rest of

1.1–1.6. *Wing and a Prayer* (1944).

Gus's effects. Then he moves to the desk and tentatively blows into Gus's harmonica before adding it to the suitcase. Finally, Scott finds an advertisement for prefabricated homes (fig. 1.3). He folds it into the woman's portrait Gus keeps on his desk (fig. 1.4). But then, thinking better of it, he crumples the ad and tosses it away before zipping up the suitcase (fig. 1.5).

This scene from *Wing and a Prayer* (1944) brings together motifs from other scenes. Gus has regularly talked softly to the

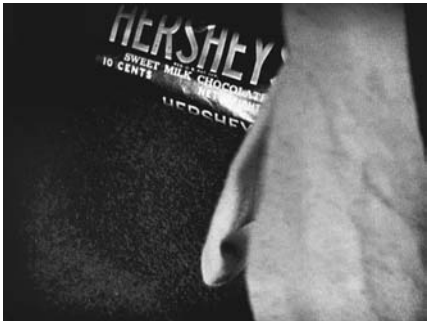
woman's photograph on his desk. Although we don't see Gus playing the harmonica, a harmonica tune was once heard in the score when he bade the photo good night. The down-home portrait (girlfriend or wife, never specified) contrasts with the framed glamor shot of a fur-wrapped starlet at Scott's bedside (fig. 1.6).

Scott's pinup is, significantly, no longer there in a later scene. Is Scott becoming more serious? The toothpaste scene suggests he is. The devastating air attack has made war real; Scott's solemn concern for Gus's belongings is altogether different from the breezy egotism he displayed at the start. The impulse to retain the toothpaste tube suggests his empathy with a family who would treasure everything left behind by their young man. At first Scott thinks the family will appreciate Gus's home-purchase ad too, so he carefully includes it with the photo. But then he seems to understand that this pointer to a future that Gus and the woman will never have would be too painful for the survivors. The moment of indecision humanizes Scott, and by discarding the ad he reveals a new sensitivity to others' feelings.

By the time of *Wing and a Prayer*, Hollywood had established a rationale for its distinctive artistry. A good movie would display a clear-cut plot, moving in steady continuity. It would engage us emotionally with characters who have goals—in this case, Scott's trying to live up to the demands of the navy squadron. In the course of the action, the character would change in attitude or self-awareness, as Scott does in becoming a dedicated part of the team.

Just as important, the film would express character not through long speeches but through action. Faces, bodies, settings, and props would carry points both obvious and subtle. "On the screen," wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald, "*seeing* is believing, no matter what the characters say."[76] In the scene from *Wing and a Prayer*, the performer, a weak actor named William Eythe, need only execute discrete actions without speaking; most of the framings deny us a look at his face. Contemporary critics and filmmakers realized that what we now call "movie moments" stemmed from a discipline organic to Hollywood's mature sound cinema.[77]

Some might argue that the situation is clichéd. Many times we've seen the picture of the dead soldier's mom or his girl, and



1.7–1.9. *Wings* (1927).

we've heard his buddies summon up sorrowful memories of him. The *Wing and a Prayer* scene is indeed indebted to a tradition, but in popular art generally, all works inherit plot devices, stylistic options, and other elements. The point is that these legacies may be turned in fresh directions. An inherited pattern, which I'll be calling a *schema*, can be reworked to good effect.

It turns out there's a precise progenitor to the *Wing and a Prayer* scene. In *Wings* (1927), two young cadets arrive for aerial training. In their tent they meet the more experienced White, who offers to share his Hershey bar before he heads out for practice maneuvers (fig. 1.7). He tosses it on the bed. But his plane crashes and he's killed. An officer orders the new men to pack up White's stuff. They pause over the conventional keepsake photo, this one of the dead man's mother, before packing it. But they halt when they see the partly eaten candy bar. One recruit edges White's socks out from underneath it (figs. 1.8 and 1.9). It doesn't occur to them to include it with his belongings—evidently because it would hurt

the family, but also perhaps because it was a part of their moment of camaraderie.

The two sequences differ in important ways, of course. The 1927 scene kills off White immediately after the recruits meet him, initiating them into sudden death. The 1944 scene, coming after Scott has seen his roommate Gus strafed by Zeros, becomes a step toward his recognition of shared sacrifice. Yet the affinity between the two moments is unmistakable. Henry Hathaway, director of *Wing and a Prayer*, admits that *Wings* was the source. "I stole it."[78]

For generations critics have deplored this side of Hollywood. Constant repetition gives us clichés. "What are you doing here?" "I can explain everything." "You're a strange person." "Well, if that's the way you feel about it!" "Race you to the raft!" The boss of the restaurant with the checkered tablecloths is named Luigi, and the backstage doorman is always called Pop. Then there are more specific items picked up from film to film, like the murderous husband's glass of milk that originates in *Suspicion* (1941) and reappears in *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* (1947). These take their place among the poisons that fill 1940s thrillers.

But Hollywood also gives us *significant* repetitions. Like all arts, cinema relies on what went before. Variants, rip-offs, and reboots are everywhere. All this intentionally imperfect replication yields beneficial change. Just as Hollywood isn't an assembly line, so its repetitions often involve valuable twists. Two scholars' description of Elizabethan theater fits the situation well: "It is a theatrical milieu buzzing with cross-references and allusions, stock conceits and sensational variations, out of which new plays were born."[79]

Forties filmmakers recognized that they were in the business of reworking earlier devices. We have Hathaway's testimony, and we don't lack other evidence. In preparing the script of *Laura*, Darryl F. Zanuck suggested that Waldo should speak like the lordly grouch in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, the detective should be presented as akin to Sam Spade, and his encounter with Laura could resemble a "Prizefighter-and-the-Lady setup."[80] "Then, as now," notes screenwriter Charles Bennett, "a studio

would approve the making of a film if it could be shown to be a variation on some earlier film."[81]

The moguls' need to know that a story element wasn't unheard-of worked to the films' advantage. For the screenwriter, approximation was good enough. Philip Dunne notes:

> Someone once defined a successful screenwriter as a man with a fairly good memory: that is, if his memory is too good he might lapse into outright plagiarism; but if it is moderately accurate he will remember in more general terms what worked before and, in the alembic of his mind, distill something new and exciting from an age-old idea.[82]

In less dignified terms, screenwriters spoke of the switch, or switcheroo. The switch often referred to recasting an earlier film's premise. Vincent Sherman explains that at Warners Bryan Foy perfected the switch: he was

> taking stories from movies that have been made before, changing the background and a few details and presenting them as new. . . . He so disguised the plot that few people caught on. I soon learned that it was a common Hollywood practice and I used it myself later on.[83]

Sherman recalled that *Dr. Socrates* (1935) became *King of the Underworld* (1939) by putting Kay Francis in Paul Muni's role. By the 1940s, a strategy that flourished in B films became common for higher-budget projects. *The Letter* (1941), for instance, was redone as *The Unfaithful* (1947).[84] *Publishers Weekly* noted that *Home of the Brave* (1949) "adroitly switched" a play about anti-Semitism to a film about anti-black prejudice.[85] A trade reviewer suggested that in *Outlaw Women* (1952), featuring a town dominated by female gunslingers, "the switch probably will offer some good exploitation possibilities."[86] The plethora of amnesia plots function as switches on the basic premise.

As for the switcheroo, the term seems to be a creation of the 1930s.[87] It apparently comes from comedy writers, who consid-

ered it "a new and different gag based on an old one."[88] Here are Hollywood gagmen in a hypothetical story conference talk:

> "We can have him drunk and eating all of the cherries out of the cocktails," proposes one gagman.
>
> "No," objects another. "Lloyd did that."
>
> "Oke," says the chief gagman. "We'll pull a switcheroo. We'll use olives instead."[89]

In *What Makes Sammy Run* (1941), the sharklike protagonist announces that he'll give *Rain* (1932) "the switcheroo" by turning the minister into a female missionary and Sadie Thompson into a gangster.[90]

The need to change the original pattern taxes ambitious filmmakers' ingenuity. Hathaway's *Wing and a Prayer* scene isn't only a steal or a simple switcheroo. It expands, varies, and adds nuance to the action of the older scene. The schema, in my parlance, was revised to yield a different, arguably more complex result. The most famous switcheroo in American cinema, changing *The Front Page*'s Hildy Johnson from male to female for *His Girl Friday* (1940), resulted in a comic masterpiece. Schema and revision, or the aesthetic of the switch, was a major driver of innovation in 1940s Hollywood.

Schemas are reliable solutions to artistic problems. They might simply be situations or visual ideas. More extensive ones are structured: they consist of patterns with parts that can be varied. Ernst Gombrich suggests that such patterns are one source of changing styles in the visual arts.[91] Schemas, which painters compiled in pattern books, were minimal models that could be fleshed out into recognizable images. A circle and an ellipse, overlapped appropriately and combined with smaller shapes, could guide the artist drawing a head. Ambitious artists could alter the schema to create new effects.

Similarly, we can think of a cinematic schema as a pattern with parts that can be creatively varied. The most obvious schemas pertain to cinematic style. In other books I've tried to trace schemas for staging in depth. A schema widely seen in the 1940s puts

one figure in the foreground, another in the middle ground, and a third in the distance.[92] Editing patterns are clearly schematic: both filmmakers and viewers have learned several common ones, such as the progression long shot/medium shot/close-up.

This book centers on narrative schemas, not stylistic ones. A great many of the switches Vincent Sherman describes are schematic in Gombrich's sense: Foy and Sherman filled the slots in a plot with different ingredients. Similarly, the common four-part structure of a Hollywood film, which I'll consider in chapter 3, is a macro schema. The typical dream sequence, introduced by showing someone sleeping and concluded when the dreamer awakes, is a schema of more middling size. A flashback can work at different scales: the entire film might be bracketed in the present by a character recollecting the past, or a single sequence or two can constitute an embedded flashback. Whatever the scale, the determiner is the present/past/present pattern. And of course some parts can be deleted. You might eliminate the opening present-time frame, plunging us into action that is only later revealed to be a memory. Or when the flashback composes the bulk of a film, you might delete the final return to the present. As we'll see, this was a fairly common option for forties film endings.

Schemas are hollow forms. You can put any sort of dream into the dream slot and any sort of past events into the embedded flashback. In *Wing and a Prayer*, Ensign Scott could have found a keychain instead of Gus's toothpaste. And because you can play with schemas, they constitute a set of options. When enough filmmakers start a scene in the midst of a dream without telling us it's a dream, this choice becomes an accepted alternative to establishing the sleeper at the start. Some revisions become normalized options for later filmmakers.

This is one reason we shouldn't call schemas formulas. Vary a chemical formula a bit and you might blow yourself up, but schemas can be revised within fairly broad limits. At the climax of *Wing and a Prayer*, an air battle plays out entirely on the sound track, as the aircraft carrier's officers and crew listen to the radio transmissions from the pilots. One by one several are shot down, while others lose contact and we're forced to wonder whether they will return. The favored option—alternating images of the

1.10–1.11. *Since You Went Away* (1944).

battle itself with images of the ship's team waiting tensely—has been recast, but the schema of representing both the battle and the crew's reactions remains recognizable.

Schemas are put to use within wider strategies of storytelling. Consider subjective narration, the strategy of plunging into a character's mind. Such a strategy could mobilize a great many schemas: the dreams and flashbacks I've just mentioned, for instance, plus internal monologues and subjective shots. Alternatively, other schemas yield a more detached presentation. The suitcase scene in *Wing and a Prayer* might have given us a voice-over in which Scott reflects on his decision to discard the home buyer's ad. The film's more objective presentation merely hints at Scott's attitude.

Even censorship can supply conventions for creative expression. Today we mock the Production Code's demand that husband and wife sleep in separate beds. But in *Since You Went Away* (1944), Selznick's home front drama, this constraint is put to expressive use. On the night Anne's husband has left for war, she looks at his unmade bed. She leaps up and wriggles into it, covers her face with the blankets, and starts to cry. The sight of one pristine bed brings home the husband's absence in a simple, powerful image, and Anne's plunging into it conveys her longing to be in his arms (figs. 1.10 and 1.11). Selznick noted, "I'm absolutely positive that this gag will not get over unless we see the two beds in the clear, one made up and one not made up, before she hops into the other bed. I think these two beds constitute good storytelling."[93]

Revising schemas was worth the trouble. Studio artisans went

to extra lengths to achieve precise formal effects. For *Now, Voyager* (1942), the screenplay sets up parallel shots for the heroine's introduction and her makeover. The first shot shows only her feet in "sensible low-heeled" shoes coming down the family staircase; eventually she's revealed as frumpy. The second shot, also concentrated on her feet, shows her, now a fashion plate, stepping down a ship's gangway. The screenplay notes, "This should be sharply reminiscent of Charlotte's introduction."[94] Hal Wallis recalled that he and screenwriter Casey Robinson worked out the parallel shots carefully. But during shooting director Irving Rapper interrupted the staircase shot with a close-up of Charlotte that, Wallis complained, "ruined the effect. I asked him to do it in one continuous shot without a break."[95] The scene was reshot.

Extra expense was justified if it created neat formal echoes. Selznick decided to start *Since You Went Away* with an exterior view of the Hilton family home. This image dissolves to a closer view showing a star in the window, indicating that a family member is in the armed forces. He wanted the final shot to start with the star in the window "to parallel that at the beginning of the picture."[96] That wasn't technically feasible, but Selznick decided to end the film by pulling back from a long-shot view of the house. It would have been far cheaper simply to have ended the film on the three-shot of the women of the family embracing; after all, everything is now resolved. But Selznick wanted "a nice rounded feeling" in his epilogue, and he was prepared to pay for it.[97]

Granted, Selznick was exceptionally finicky, but a symmetrical opening and closing was a schema within this tradition. Hollywood valued these formal rhymes. The hardheaded film business is willing to invest in vivid, emotionally gripping artistry identified with quality moviemaking.

Of course these schemas have precedents. The approach/retreat on display in openings and closings can be found in many films, not least *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1938).[98] The heroine of *My Best Girl* (1927) is introduced by a traveling shot of her feet that anticipates the close-ups of *Now, Voyager*, and abrupt before-and-after entrances of a protagonist can be found in *Rain* (1932). Nor are schemas ironclad: they offer many options. Selznick had considered enclosing the main story of *Rebecca* within

the approach/retreat schema but wound up preferring a more vivid, asymmetrical ending: the burning pillow emblazoned with a forbidding *R*.

One more distinction is worth making. Plot switches, like the gender change for Hildy in *His Girl Friday*, affect the story world, but they needn't change aspects of the manner of storytelling—the order in which events are presented, or the character we're attached to, or which characters' minds we access. Several 1940s filmmakers eagerly tinkered with schemas of these sorts. In this they were echoing Zanuck in this book's epigraph: "Half the battle depends on *how* you tell the story." They believed, with him, that the *how* was "the most important half." And the various *how*s that developed became, in turn, schemas that other filmmakers could revise.

So far my account follows Jean-Claude Carrière's point that filmmakers respond to other filmmakers' work. What about the spectators outside the filmmaking community? From this angle, the audiences sets limits on how far the filmmakers can go. Screenwriters and directors hypothesize what will get across and what won't. Sometimes they're wrong. We'll encounter some instances in which new schemas or revisions outrun viewers' ability to parse them. But as the forms change, the presentation may become more complex and more elliptical. The 1944 viewer of *Wing and a Prayer* has to work a little harder than the 1927 viewer of *Wings*; more implications about Gus and Scott are conjured up than are present in the earlier film. I won't be concerned to trace this learning curve in detail, but we'll encounter it often enough to confirm the hunch that by and large 1940s audiences kept up with the films. As filmmakers rework schemas, spectators become more skillful in understanding them.

Schema, formula, norm, convention, switcheroo—whatever we call the process of varying received patterns, it reminds us that Hollywood cinema was and is highly formal. Filmmakers may claim they're aiming at realism, but fresh subject matter and themes are usually subordinated to the demands of traditional storytelling.

From this angle, the thousands of films Hollywood released from 1939 to 1952 look like a vast array of alternatives, of story

combinations proliferating wildly. In the pages to come I'll use various metaphors to describe that process. When we try to visualize a filmmaker choosing among alternatives, it's useful to think of a menu, with more or less fixed options. But the menu analogy misses the dynamic quality, the sense of variants mixing and breeding new hybrids. So perhaps we should visualize the whole thing as a teeming, squirming ecosystem. It played host to exact copies ("What are you doing here?") along with more or less inexact variants—schemas mingling, splitting, fusing, and mutating. And if we back off far enough to see patterns in the stream of story ideas, we can reposition them all in a theme-and-variation array, a map stretching to a virtual horizon. Grasping the storytelling menu, map, and ecosystem is the main goal of this book.

We're used to treating genres as variations on central themes, but we haven't fully considered narrative devices displaying the same logic across genres. Forties Hollywood confronts us with a vast variorum. Just as a variorum edition of a classic work of literature includes differing versions of the text, American studio cinema of this (or any) period can be seen as assembling variants of kindred narrative devices. Moreover, it turns out, those schemas and the principles guiding them aren't exclusive to cinema. Popular media as a whole constitute an even bigger Aladdin's cave of storytelling strategies.

ENTERTAINMENT AS A SWAP MEET

The dynamic of schema and revision is basic to every era of Hollywood filmmaking, but it was unusually adventurous in the 1940s. The pressure to produce films, the comparative looseness of studio and censorship strictures, the growing independence of writers, directors, and producers, and, at least in the first part of the decade, the fair likelihood that even somewhat eccentric films could make money: all these circumstances encouraged risk taking. Accordingly, many ambitious filmmakers played with scrambled time schemes, shifting points of view, direct address, and other breaks with the 1930s norms of linear, objective, seamless storytelling.

We might associate these new strategies with the work of

High Modernism. By the forties American culture was well aware of the accomplishments of Proust, Eliot, Joyce, Kafka, Picasso, Stravinsky, Woolf, Faulkner, and other giants. For many, modernism had become identified not only with a worldview but with an inventory of techniques running athwart traditions. Consequently, weren't the new schemas and revisions we'll encounter vulgarizing these techniques? Had Hollywood finally caught up with the avant-garde?

Certainly many Hollywood artisans were familiar with avant-garde culture. Producer Walter Wanger knew advanced European theater, and the young Ben Hecht wrote experimental poetry. The stream of émigrés brought European culture to Los Angeles: René Clair, before working in Hollywood, had made the Dadaist *Entr'acte* (1924). Yet the influence of modernism on forties film, I think, wasn't simple or direct.

For one thing, many of the film techniques we'll consider have distant precedents. Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins were masters of shifting viewpoints; traditional comedy often addressed the audience; intricate flashbacks go back as far as the *Odyssey*. More recently, August Strindberg, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and other writers explored narrative possibilities that chime with what we'll find in Hollywood. Well before the modernist annus mirabilis of 1922 (*Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*) narrative innovations emerged at all levels. In 1914 we find one critic proposing that a play could be told in reverse order (act 1 in autumn, act 2 in summer, etc.) and pointing out that a John Galsworthy novel presented three intertwined stories caught at different points in their unfolding (beginning, middle, climax).[99] Before the Nighttown sequence of *Ulysses*, Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (1920) had narrated a portion of its plot in the form of a play.

Similarly, again and again we'll find one-off instances of tricky strategies in earlier American films. As we saw in *The Last Warning* (1929), silent cinema had made occasional use of flashbacks, viewpoint shifts, and the like. In the forties these strategies were revived, enriched, and made more pervasive—reinforced, I think, by developments in popular fiction and theater.

Those developments may be best understood as a discovery and reworking of that turn-of-the-century tradition one critic

labeled "the well-made novel."[100] Flashbacks, block construction, multiple viewpoints, contrary voices, and plunges into subjectivity became highlighted in the works of James, Conrad, Edith Wharton, and their imitators. These models were ultimately more important than High Modernism in shaping the innovations we associate with 1940s Hollywood.[101]

But on the whole the influence isn't direct. By the time they were absorbed into film, these "well-made" storytelling schemas had become accessible to a broad public. In the wake of James's novels and his prefaces to the New York edition of his work (1907–9), there emerged serious anatomies of literary method, culminating in Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (1921), a book-length disquisition on narration and point of view.[102] Popular writers began assimilating the lessons of the James tradition. John Galsworthy, Joseph Hergesheimer, Lewis Bromfield, and other writers self-consciously merged the novel of social and psychological realism with sharp-edged formal design. Even Somerset Maugham, a definitive middlebrow author, incorporated Conradian filtering narrators into *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919).

The dissemination—some would say vulgarization—of the technique of neatly carpentered fiction was accelerated by writers' manuals. Clayton Hamilton's *Problems of the Playwright* (1917), Edith Wharton's *The Writing of Fiction* (1924), Edwin Muir's *The Structure of the Novel* (1928), and Thomas H. Uzzell's *Narrative Technique* (1924, 1929) codified the principles of the James/Conrad tradition. Uzzell, for instance, distinguishes objective from subjective viewpoints, contrasts omniscient and restricted narration, and analyzes stories told by a minor character.[103] These popularizations made workaday writers aware of a palette of options—rules, even—that could be applied in mainstream novels and magazine stories.

Needless to say, the writers of High Modernism—sensing already that the post-Jamesian innovations were becoming part of a genteel mainstream—pushed further than their predecessors. Joyce, Woolf, and Gide exhibit the avant-garde impulse Harry Levin called Ultraism, the drive to take any innovation to the limit.[104] Modernist stream of consciousness pulverizes the Flaubertian train of thought. In place of the Jamesian geometrical

plot, *Ulysses* offers a slice of life but complicates it with digressions, a forbidding surface texture, and several conceptual grids (Homeric parallels, colors, bodily organs). *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) probes a woman's life through a single day broken by flashbacks and parallel stories.

It's very likely that modernist writing, in radicalizing the "well-made" techniques of earlier in the century, made the literati more aware of them. But popular writers realized that the devices could be used in less abrasive ways than we find in the High Modernist canon. Subjective narration, as inner monologue or stage soliloquy, need not have a Joycean choppiness to seem fresh and serve new purposes.

The result might be called moderate modernism, the tendency to encase the well-made novel within a striking exoskeleton. Rex Stout, remembered today as an author of superlative detective fiction, started out with *How Like a God* (1929); the book consists of scenes of a man slowly ascending a staircase, intercut with the events that led up to his fateful visit. Other authors offered reverse chronologies and novels within novels.[105] The most influential of these mildly experimental authors was John Dos Passos. *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) and the *USA* trilogy (1930–35) showed how documentary realism, political criticism, and plunges into subjectivity could be merged in a jittery panoramic collage.[106] The Dos Passos format would remain a model of user-friendly modernism into the 1950s, most notably in Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948).

Comparable mainstreaming of avant-garde experiment was taking place on stage. On Broadway the plays of Elmer Rice, Maxwell Anderson, J. B. Priestley, and lesser writers experimented with shifting events out of order or positing uncanny repetitions. Thornton Wilder's *The Long Christmas Dinner* (1931) squeezed ninety years of a family's history into thirty-five minutes, with characters departing and joining the table (that is, dying and being born). Priestley's *Dangerous Corner* (1932) offered two alternative futures. Eugene O'Neill, the most celebrated American modernist playwright, acquainted theatergoers with symbolism and abstract techniques, including the representation of a split personality (*Days without End*, 1934).

In staging, one advanced trend was "Theatricalism," an extension of European experiments in stage design. Theatricalism showcased stylized spectacle. The stage no longer represented a realistic locale but simply presented itself as a space for performance, often stripped of settings and props. Productions incorporated platforms, turntables, sound effects, enveloping darkness cut by shafts of light, extended playing areas (including areas of the audience), and projection of slides and films. Such practices were incorporated into mainstream shows as well as left-wing protest plays like *Waiting for Lefty* (1935) and revivals of classics like Orson Welles's "fascist" *Julius Caesar* (1937).[107]

What Dwight Macdonald deplored as Midcult, the assimilation of modernism to middle-class tastes, was a pervasive fact of 1930s Anglo-American arts and letters. He charged that writers like Wilder owed their popularity to shrewdly packaging avant-garde techniques.[108] Yet Macdonald and other cultural mandarins missed the fact that storytelling tactics from the upper reaches were sifting into genre fiction and radio too. The techniques of both the well-made novel and modernist Ultraism were being shaped and shaved to fit the needs of mass entertainment.

Accordingly, interwar novels of women at work and in love developed versions of stream of consciousness and limited viewpoint. Mystery plots proved especially open to experimental techniques.[109] Writers exploited embedded tales and games with chronology in order to create unreliable narration. As *Mrs. Dalloway* presented the intersecting fates of several characters on a single day, Gerald Bullett's novel *The Jury* (1935) focuses on twelve individuals convening to hear a case. As the proceedings unfold, flashbacks to each juror's life are shuffled with portions of the group's deliberations and bits of testimony. The jacket copy for the wholly forgotten *Bittern Point* (1926) reads like Gide meeting Pirandello:

> The plot is strangely compounded of two stories interfused—stories whose heroes are not only separated by hundreds of miles in space, but by two centuries in time. The shorter and subsidiary story is the work of the novelist who is the heroine of

> the central narrative—and the reader is led to suppose an identity between the fiction writer and her own protagonist, and to imagine that the characters that she has created have actually become real.

Bittern Point's subtitle is *A Modern Mystery Story*.[110]

Radio writers came somewhat later to the trend, since dramatic programs did not begin in earnest until the mid-1930s. With the rise of national networks, Arch Oboler, Norman Corwin, Orson Welles, and others brought mildly modernist techniques to the airwaves.[111] "The Fall of the City," a 1937 choral drama by Archibald MacLeish, presented a political coup as a radio broadcast, a reflexive gesture that Welles would push further the following year in "The War of the Worlds." In adapting *Dracula* and *Heart of Darkness*, Welles and his team respected the time juggling and perspectival shifts of the originals. Oboler began his exploration of stream of consciousness narration in his *Lights Out* series, and it reached its apex in the sustained monologue of his 1940 adaptation of *Johnny Got His Gun*, a novel that itself assimilated Jamesian and modernist techniques. Radio was much more popular than movies and by 1940 had an audience of over six million in prime time. It was a vast platform for disseminating new storytelling techniques.[112]

Going into the 1940s, then, there was a lively tradition of moderate modernism. Plays and radio shows and slick-magazine fiction borrowed devices from 1910s and 1920s literary traditions. Hollywood had already participated in these innovations at one remove, chiefly by adapting offbeat plays like *Strange Interlude* (1932) and *Dangerous Corner* (1933).[113] But in the forties, Hollywood would more fully borrow and revise these storytelling schemas. Popular culture became even more a swap meet, where creators in adjacent media met to exchange and refurbish unusual storytelling ideas.

Hollywood's tardiness was probably inevitable. New techniques can be tried out in literary fiction more cheaply than in the expensive art of cinema. Once flashbacks and multiple narrators proved useful in other media, filmmakers were able to adapt

them. Hollywood's reliance on best sellers, mass-market magazine fiction, and Broadway made it possible for a gimmick like the absent men constantly discussed onstage in *The Women* (1936) to be preserved in the 1939 screen version. The snow globe that triggers memories in the novel *Kitty Foyle* (1939) could be retained in the film version (1940) and reappear, suitably adjusted to context, in *All This and Heaven Too* (1940) and *Citizen Kane* (1941). More generally, by borrowing techniques from other media, film played an important role in disseminating them. The slippage from present reality to memory and fantasy in the stage production of *Death of a Salesman* (1949) was witnessed by far fewer people than its equivalent in the 1951 film.

Forties films did more than simply snatch up these techniques, though. Filmmakers recast them into something new, partly because of film's distinctive properties. For example, literary inner monologue and theatrical soliloquy are easily ported over to film, but crucial changes follow. In literature the character's thoughts typically alternate with objective passages describing action, while the cinematic voice-over can be simultaneous with what happens onscreen. The result is a greater concentration of information and an engagement of two sense modes. Likewise, the stage soliloquy is tied to the actor's presence, while the voice-over in film can float over a series of disparate images.

Another factor affected the borrowing process: the pressures of classical filmmaking tradition. Clarity and comprehensibility remained paramount. A flashback can be swifter and more elliptical in a novel than in film because often a simple change of tense ("he had seen her on the street that morning") flags a shift back in time. Films of the 1940s tended to mark transitions more heavily. A reader uncertain about a scene's position in time could flip back to earlier pages, but a film viewer needed to understand immediately, as the film flowed on. Some decades later, filmmakers would seek to capture the shuttling rapidity of literary flashbacks, but only after cinematic cues for flashbacks had become thoroughly conventional.

Hollywood's selective borrowing of literary or theatrical techniques was also affected by institutional constraints, such as studio policies and trade journalism. Scenes presented out of chron-

ological order were perfectly common in genre fiction, but when films used them, critics and exhibitors sometimes objected that they were too demanding for the audience. Nothing intrinsic to cinema prevents a film from presenting a voice-over issuing from a deaf-mute, but when Daniel Mainwaring proposed it for *Out of the Past* (1947) the idea was turned down.

It was all a genuine swap meet because cinema contributed a lot in its turn. Films had a pervasive effect on popular narrative. A novel like Helen Eustis's *Horizontal Man* (1946) sets up a classic Hollywood couple, a reporter and a college girl acting as detectives, and adds a psychiatrist, dream sequences, flashbacks, passages of amnesia, an oblique "offscreen" opening murder, and the revelation of childhood trauma: virtually a 1940s movie in print. Cornell Woolrich specialized in turning film noir imagery into prose:

> I could even see the shadow of my own head thrown up on the wall by that halo from the lamp. I could see it jitter a little, and then go down out of sight, and then come up again, and then jitter some more. . . . Then suddenly it was swept way offside somewhere. . . . There was a full-length shadow of a man in its place now. Triangular, starting narrow, ending wide, and going all the way up. And I hadn't moved, and the lamp shade hadn't moved, so I knew what it was.[114]

As early as 1939 James T. Farrell objected that the hard-boiled novel was modeled on Hollywood films.[115] Ten years later a novel mimicking police-procedural movies could itself become a police-procedural movie.[116]

More pervasively, several mildly modernist effects on display in other media were already borrowed from Hollywood. Radio's sound "montages" derived from the montage sequences of silent cinema and passages of auditory cutting, as in Lang's *Fury* (1936). Dos Passos frankly imitated cinematic technique in his *USA* novels, which included passages labeled "Newsreel" and "The Camera Eye." Genre fiction was full of crosscutting and subjective sequences.

Similarly, Theatricalist stage design owed debts to film, par-

ticularly in the use of rapid scene transitions and screened footage. Playwrights and designers sought to achieve a filmic fluidity by eliminating act breaks, linking scenes by "fade-outs," and shifting scenes across different areas of the stage. *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) like *Our Town*, relied on a narrator, and some productions included film projections. Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Allegro* (1948) featured a narrator, voices from the dead, subjective monologues (delivered by a chorus), and a panoply of projected images, treadmills, and moving scenery that yielded what Stephen Sondheim recalled as "a cinematic approach to staging." *Allegro* sought to be a flesh-and-blood film.[117]

For some intellectuals, the popular media's conquest of storytelling was a sign that ambitious narrative art was exhausted. Broadway had turned middlebrow with musicals and the work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. Joyce and Woolf were gone, and Faulkner and Hemingway were past their prime. Mailer, Bellow, Vidal, Capote, Salinger, and other emerging talents worked within traditional psychological realism, as did the older James M. Cain and John O'Hara.[118] Observers spoke of "the death of the novel," claiming there were no new territories to conquer. The energy seemed to have jumped from creation to commentary; the rise of thematic and mythic interpretation in universities launched an "age of criticism." By 1960 Harry Levin could survey a devastated field—the passing of proletarian fiction, the timid novelty of Off Broadway—and ask, "What was modernism?"[119]

Part of the blame, it seems, belonged to Hollywood. Drama critic Eric Bentley charged that Theatricalist flamboyance had taken root in films.[120] A novelist conceded that cinema was superior to literature in "the recital of plot and the development of dramatic incident." The modern writer sought a Hollywood sale, and a novel's purely literary virtues were sure to vaporize en route "to its ultimate realization in another art form, the movies."[121]

Such charges seem to support Claudia Roth Pierpont's remark that in the forties "all popular art aspired to the condition of the movies."[122] Yet movies relied heavily on the other arts too.

Whatever a narrative device might owe to earlier films, it likely owed something to literature, radio, and drama as well. American popular media circulated stories and techniques, the whats and the hows, with a freedom and flexibility that created a brisk traffic in innovation.

That traffic wasn't unknown in Hollywood's silent days or the 1930s. But it intensified during the Five Fat Years. By hiring ambitious talents and borrowing storytelling techniques from adjacent arts, the studios put their box office bounty to good use. Rivalry and collaboration encouraged a quick cadence of schema and revision—sometimes timid, sometimes outlandish. After the boom ended, the pressure didn't let up. To compete with television and other pastimes, movies needed not only new stories and subjects but new narrative forms.

In this churning milieu, audacious filmmakers pushed the boundaries, while middling talents could take risks as well. The switcheroo tradition and the multimedia swap meet enabled both novices and veterans to create one of the most exhilarating eras in film history.

INTERLUDE

Spring 1940: Lessons from *Our Town*

DEVELOPMENTS IN FILM FORM AND STYLE DON'T FOLLOW THE calendar. We shouldn't expect big changes to start at midnight on New Year's Eve 1939. Yet if we pause on the second part of the 1939–40 season, we might be tempted to think some strong innovations did seem to be in the offing.

January 1940, for instance, brought *Married and in Love*, a B project from RKO. Former lovers meet after both have married others, and they recall their first affair. Just when the man has decided to run off with his old flame, his naive wife tells the other couple how she and her husband coped with the death of their baby. Her confession persuades the former lovers to recognize the difference between passion and abiding devotion, and they abandon their plans.

What's noteworthy about this simple plot is that in sixty minutes' running time the film presents no fewer than six flashbacks.[1] The college romance, an early separation, the first years of the man's marriage—glimpses of these moments in the past interrupt the husband's hesitation about breaking with his wife. If we want a harbinger of the 1940s obsession with flashback construction, *Married and in Love* would serve nicely.[2]

A more spacious flashback fills out MGM's *Edison, the Man* in May. The film is something of an experiment, since it was planned

as a sequel to *Young Tom Edison*, released only two months before. Preparing to attend a tribute dinner, the elderly Edison muses on his struggles, and his voice-over narration traces the invention of the phonograph and electric lighting. A great man's life recalled in flashback would become a canonical format for films as different as *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1943) and *Ruthless* (1948). We might find prefigurations of *Citizen Kane* (1941) here as well: a young journalist interviews Edison at home, and at the end of the flashback the wizard's accomplishments are summed up in a quasi-newsreel.

Reviewers scoffed at an August throwaway, *One Crowded Night* (RKO), because its premise relied on massive coincidence. Several characters are brought together at a desert motor lodge. Some work there, some are passing through, and one, a jail escapee unjustly accused of murder, slips in to see his wife and child. A pregnant woman must get off the bus to bear her child, and who should arrive, unknown to her, but her husband, a prisoner of two good-natured cops. We watch a lonely waitress romanced by the gas jockey, and a trucker who wants to marry another waitress. Both waitresses are in turn linked to the gangsters who come looking for the runaway con. It might be called *Grand Motel*. At sixty-six minutes, it is indeed a crowded night, but in its interweaving of several distinct plotlines and its refusal to make any one character central, it looks forward to multiple-protagonist plots like *Lifeboat* (1944) and *Hotel Berlin* (1945).

Just a week after *One Crowded Night*, RKO released another B title, *Stranger on the Third Floor*. Announced as experimental, it was widely disliked by both the industry and influential critics.[3] Today it's celebrated as an early crystallization of the conventions of film noir. The plot turns on a reporter whose testimony sends an innocent man to Death Row. The reporter becomes plagued by doubts, and further murders teach him what it's like to be a suspect. Once he's arrested, his girlfriend takes up the investigation, a plot switch that will be reused in the classic noir *Phantom Lady* (1944). Latvian émigré director Boris Ingster plays up the mental anguish of the hero through flashbacks, subjective voice-over, and a stylized dream sequence reminiscent of avant-garde European cinema (fig. S1940.1). Even the real-world scenes are

S1940.1. *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940): A dream image of imprisonment.

S1940.2. The haunted protagonist in his apartment.

filmed by Nicholas Musuraca with the crisp chiaroscuro we associate with High Forties imagery (fig. S1940.2).

Shall we say, then, that major innovations start in spring 1940? Evidently not. These four films look prophetic, but they arise from trends that were emerging sporadically in the previous decade. *A Man to Remember* (1938) contains as many flashbacks as *Married and in Love*, and these are motivated not as character memory but rather as "objective" trips into the past—a more unusual strategy. Likewise, *The Devil Is a Woman* (1935) offers us six flashbacks too, and in only forty-five minutes. The lengthy return to the past we encounter in *Edison, the Man* can be found in films like *Midnight Mary* (1933) and *The Life of Vergie Winters* (1934).[4]

The converging-storylines plot is rarer, epitomized in *Grand Hotel* (1932), but it's also evident in *International House* (1933), *Four Hours to Kill* (1935), and *Stagecoach* (1939). *One Crowded Night* works a switch on the format through its mundane setting. And extraordinary as *Stranger on the Third Floor* looks to us now, it owes a good deal to earlier crime films such as *Blind Alley* (May 1939), which contains an equally stylized dream sequence. Ingster's intense low-key imagery was likewise emerging as conventional for realistic murder stories. We don't diminish the originality of these and other 1940 releases if we acknowledge that they build on earlier instances of unusual storytelling techniques.

Another curious film of the spring 1940 season, however, is worth a closer look. This film gained greater acclaim than all these others. A contender for five Academy Awards, it was a high-

water mark in Hollywood's attempts at prestigious art. Seen today, it seems bizarre, even grotesque. Yet it is an assemblage of a great many devices that would become normalized in the 1940s. And those devices are mostly borrowed from another art form.

AFFABLE MODERNISM

Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938) was hugely successful on Broadway and won the Pulitzer Prize before becoming a staple of amateur theater and arguably the most famous of all American plays. But for intellectuals it also became a central instance of middlebrow modernism. The minimalist, presentational format —no curtain, bare stage, a few props wheeled on as needed, and the Stage Manager's offhand direct address—all seemed swiped from Pirandello, Brecht, and Asian theater. Critic Dwight Macdonald saw these borrowings as being applied to a piece of Norman Rockwell Americana and puffed up with banal ruminations on life, death, and our place in the universe.[5]

Sol Lesser, an independent producer, turned the play into a May 1940 release for United Artists.[6] The result was felt by many critics to be a refreshing exercise in simplicity. That seems a curious judgment today. Granted, by Hollywood standards there's not much of a plot. Like the play, the film merely recounts four days, at intervals of years, in the lives of two neighboring families in Grover's Corners, New Hampshire. There are no villains and no conflict. The young George Gibbs wants to work his uncle's farm, but this goal isn't blocked, and he achieves it without trouble. George's romance with Emily Webb faces no rivals and no parental objections. As an early review of the New York production by Mary McCarthy indicates, the play is more lyrical than dramatic, an exploration of cosmic themes rather than a clash of wills.[7] If the story world is mundane, however, the storytelling is intricate, even tangled, in the manner of prototypical 1940s cinema.

The first problem for the filmmakers is how to represent Grover's Corners. Today a director might consider respecting the sparse Theatricalist staging. An empty space could be activated by the sketchy sets mentioned in the play, such as the two stepladders George and Emily perch on while doing homework

S1940.3. *Our Town* (1940): Grover's Corners Gothic.

S1940.4. A low angle magnifies a family breakfast.

at facing bedroom windows. Instead, as publicity for the film explained in advance, there are sets depicting the households, the town buildings, and the landscape. But these are not the sets of, say, Andy Hardy's backlot hometown.

We are clearly in a sound stage, with its rear projections, cramped interiors, and thudding footsteps on hollow pavement. The stark photography makes no attempt to render the high-key glow of Hollywood Americana. The shadows and ceilings are signature devices of art director William Cameron Menzies, impresario of the grandiose and Gothic.[8] Nothing could be more different from the humble minimalism of the stage production than the film's baroque sets, very tight close-ups, and off-kilter compositions (fig. S1940.3). The result is an in-between world, giving the most casual routine, such as fixing breakfast or feeding the chickens, an eerie monumentality (fig. S1940.4). Many of these gigantic shots look forward to the deep-focus imagery made popular by *Citizen Kane*.[9]

Our Town skips through time in ways seldom seen in 1930s Hollywood, and it's authorized to do it by the organization of the play. After the prologue, the film gives us the play's first act, a day in the life of families living next door to each other. The milkman comes, the mothers make breakfast, the children rush off to school, chores are done, and the day runs along till evening with choir practice, homework, and Emily Webb's peroration to the night. There follows act 2, set three years later, on the day of George and Emily's wedding. But that is interrupted by a flash-

back to the day a year earlier when they realized, over strawberry ice-cream sodas, that they were in love. We return to the wedding, and they marry. Fade out.

The film's finale is more complicated than that of the play. It is now 1913, and Emily is in labor. In the play, she dies and enters the cemetery. The graves are represented as actors in rows of chairs. After talking with her mother-in-law and others who have passed on, Emily strives to hold on to her memories by returning to her family on her sixteenth birthday. She returns to the graveyard in shock: None of the living take notice of the moments ebbing away forever. Emily, always of a hypersensitive nature ("Isn't the moonlight *terrible*?" she had asked George), wishes she had savored each instant. "Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you." Now she knows why the dead do not wish to revisit the world. As the play closes, she accepts her place in the graveyard.

Sol Lesser shrewdly let it be known that the film would not end this way.[10] Emily would survive, he explained to the press.[11] Wilder endorsed the rewrite, justifying it by claiming that cinema gave the audience an intimacy with the characters that couldn't be achieved on the stage, where the characters are "halfway abstractions in an allegory." He added: "Let her live—the idea will have been imparted anyway."[12]

By "the idea," he meant the theme of grasping immediate experience as a defense against the overwhelming presence of death. Mortality hovers over both play and film from the start. No sooner have we met the cheerful paperboy than we learn he will be cut down in the Great War. Upon Mrs. Gibbs's entrance, the narrator casually announces the cause of her death (pneumonia), the location (Canton, Ohio), and her final resting place, foreshadowing her presence in the cemetery in the final act. These and many other glimpses of the end of life are retained in the film and provide the cosmic backdrop for the mundane human activity in the foreground.

If the film's Emily is to live, she must nonetheless glimpse death and learn the lesson of appreciating life. In parallel with the embedded flashback of the soda-fountain courtship, the climax inserts a hallucinatory sequence in which Emily, during child-

S1940.5. Emily joins the dead.

S1940.6. Emily rejoins the living, with her sixteen-year-old self eating breakfast behind her.

birth, visits the cemetery. Her vision might be delirium, a dream, or some psychic connection with the dead. Emily mentally leaves home after a blurry point-of-view shot of family portraits dotting the farmhouse wall. Standing calmly up and down the hillside, murmuring among themselves, the departed citizens of Grover's Corners stare out at eternity (fig. S1940.5). The film then returns to the play's dialogue, and Emily goes back in memory to visit her household.

In the play, the actress playing Emily must walk to another section of the stage and portray herself at age sixteen, while quivering with the knowledge that she is also dead. In the film, dead Emily is a glowing avatar (fig. S1940.6). Thanks to a moving matte shot, she watches herself as a girl come down to breakfast and talk with her mother and George while her father is calling for her upstairs. Overcome, dead Emily wails that everyone is oblivious to what matters, and as the kitchen setting recedes, she grows bigger and brighter until her cry, "I want to live!" gets unnaturally loud. It snaps us, and her, out of the reverie. We are back in the bedroom, and Emily is smiling at her newborn baby. All that remains is for the narrator to wrap things up as per the play's epilogue and wish the audience good night.

A vision of the future—Emily's possible death—conjures up a sort of flashback that is at once objective (Emily's birthday is presented as it happened) and subjective (because she imagines herself visiting the scene post mortem). This is a fairly complicated way to arrange for your heroine to survive. As we'll find

S1940.7. The avuncular narrator Mr. Morgan as Stage Manager.

throughout this book, many innovations in Hollywood narrative aren't merely rejections of constraints. They're compromises, and sometimes pretty contorted ones. Had Emily died, it would have been, as Wilder says, "disproportionately cruel."[13] But had she simply given birth without the cemetery interlude, the cosmic point of the play would have been blunted. Wilder, Lesser, and the other filmmakers had to give her a brush with death that would maintain the play's theme of the infinite preciousness of each moment.

THE HOMESPUN CHORUS

The film likewise modifies the play's storytelling strategies. Central to both is the personified narrator, the role assumed by the Stage Manager of the stage version. In the film he is Mr. Morgan the storekeeper, an easygoing, pipe-smoking Yankee (fig. S1940.7). Less firmly "outside" the story world than the Stage Manager, Morgan shares the Manager's omniscience, to the extent of letting us in on what will happen in the future.

Morgan introduces the action in a prologue. After coming into view along a rail fence, he tells us generally about Grover's Corners and its ordinariness. Across the film he initiates scenes, prompts a professor to provide facts and figures, becomes a voice-over presence, appears in his storekeeper role, and guides us to the hilltop cemetery where the climax will occur. Morgan as narrator returns in an epilogue and withdraws from the film, strolling back along the fence and passing out of sight over a hill. The strongly marked beginning and ending (approach/withdrawal)

provide a symmetry not signaled in the play but conventional in movies.

In between, Morgan wraps the story action in his voice-over commentary. To some extent his constant patter compensates for the absence of traditional conflict and character change. As Mary McCarthy's review of the stage piece points out, Wilder "has taken what is accessory to the ordinary play, exposition, and made it the main substance of his. . . . [Items of background information] take the place of plot, stage business, and repartee. . . . The action which is intermittently progressing on the stage merely illustrates Mr. Craven's talk."[14]

American theater of the 1930s had revived the ancient convention of the commenting Chorus by adopting forms of direct address to the audience. Wilder's play appeared alongside Living Newspaper productions and Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* (1938), and Brecht's narrated plays had become known in the United States as well. Wilder had already tried out the Stage Manager device in the one-act *Pullman Car Hiawatha* of 1932. Radio drama had also accustomed audiences to the presence of a commenting narrator who might also play a role in a scene.

Still, a narrator who addresses the viewer was unusual in Hollywood cinema. There are instances of to-camera address in the 1930s, but these occur largely in comedies like *One Hour with You* (1932) and the Marx Brothers' films. For *Our Town* to use the device with dramatic gravitas was a marked innovation. Even more unusual are the questions from the audience after the professor's briefing. This is an effect easy to achieve in live theater but very difficult to duplicate on film. Lesser struggled to find an equivalent for this exchange between auditorium and stage; he even considered planting shills in first-run screenings.[15] He eventually settled on voice-off questioners who exist, like the town's setting and Morgan himself, in a halfway realm between stylized theater and conventional cinema.

Sometimes Morgan isn't seen but introduces scenes with standard voice-over accompaniment. Even here, however, the substance of his commentary is innovative, as he predicts some of what will happen to the characters we see. His power over the presentation is reinforced during the film's middle section, when

S1940.8. Emily takes over as to-camera narrator.

he summons George and Emily to enact their after-school courtship. Here, for the only time, he becomes a character, playing the kindly druggist who serves their sodas. Yet the scene ends with him flaunting his control over what we see: He covers the lens with his hand and lifts it away to reveal a new scene. At still other points, his authority is manifested when he delegates bits of narration to the characters. During the wedding, he introduces the situation and then vanishes while we hear the internal monologues of various characters, from the minister to the bridal couple.

Just as Emily's cemetery hallucination adds a layer of subjectivity to the play's more objective presentation, Emily as a point-of-view character in the graveyard scene complicates the narration. The hallucination takes us more deeply into a character's mind than we have been before, and for once the shift isn't overseen by Morgan. Her projection of life after death and the "flashback" to her sixteenth birthday aren't mediated by his explanations. In effect, Emily takes over the film's narration.

Her seizure of narrative authority culminates in a moment of direct address. This has been a feature of Morgan's relation to us, and once he allows the professor to lecture straight to the camera. But Emily doesn't need the narrator's permission to take over. Surging into a kind of vacuum as she leaves the kitchen behind (fig. S1940.8), she looks straight at us and asks, "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? Every, every minute?" Emily gives us an impassioned complement to Morgan's dry asides on the inevitability of death. What he imperturbably accepts, she has had to learn. But as a counterweight, her anguish

leaps to an emotional pitch that his easygoing murmurs don't achieve.

From this climax the film tapers off. Once Emily returns to the bed and sees her child, Morgan assumes control again and ushers us smoothly to the epilogue.

Just as Wilder's play drew on new theatrical techniques of his day, so does the film transpose his innovations, sometimes uneasily, to cinema. The film of *Our Town* illustrates how mild modernism prodded filmmakers to innovate. The devices gathered here—interruptive flashbacks, voice-over narration, inner monologues, ambivalent fantasy sequences, direct address to the viewer—would proliferate in the years ahead. Even the humanizing of the supernatural would continue with dead narrators who revisit their small towns.

I'm not prepared to argue that *Our Town* was a direct source or influence, though it may have inspired some filmmakers. Rather, its aggregation of narrative strategies handily reveals some emerging complexities of Hollywood storytelling. If the cinema of the 1940s hadn't pursued those options, *Our Town* would be a curious outlier. As things turned out, it's a signpost of changes to come.

CHAPTER 2

Time and Time Again

That picture had an involved story, with flashback within flashback, and I hated it. The interesting thing is that not long ago I saw the film, and it looked better than when I made it.

Vincent Sherman, director of *Backfire* (1950)[1]

A WOMAN IS SPEAKING. THE CAMERA CREEPS IN ON HER. TO musical accompaniment, the image dissolves. A new image emerges: a scene in the past. When that action in the past concludes, another dissolve carries us back to the present, again smoothed over by the character's dialogue in the present.

We're so used to flashbacks that we seldom notice how strictly codified they are. True, there are some variations. The character might be not speaking but thinking, so we're hearing her inner monologue. Maybe what we see just before the dissolve isn't the character but a significant object, or someone she's watching. The music might be tonally uncertain, or the transition may be eased by noise rather than a melody, or there may be no sound at all.

The cues might vary, but their patterning is constant. We understand that events moving forward in the present have been put on hold so we can skip back to the past. That is, we grasp the schematic structure underlying the flow of images and sounds.

The silent cinema had utilized plenty of flashbacks, and film-

makers then established the schema *emphasis on a character/optical device/past-tense action/optical transition/return to character*.[2] In the early days of sound filming, when musical underscoring was difficult, filmmakers could get away with some dialogue cues plus an optical transition. In *The Trial of Vivienne Ware* (1932) the dead man's butler asserts, "I was serving breakfast." Abruptly the camera whip pans, and we see the butler leaving the breakfast table.

By 1940, however, sound usually bleeds over the transition. The courtroom scenes in *A Woman's Face* (1941) ease into the past through the musical score or through tunes from the upcoming scene. Even so, when we come out of a flashback in the film, there might be no music. The silence can emphasize a last line of dialogue or a gesture, as when at the end of one flashback in *A Woman's Face* the woman on trial gently kisses the shirt cuff of the man she thinks she loves.

The flashback is a fundamental resource of 1940s cinematic storytelling. While often associated with film noir and the woman's melodrama, it's extensively used in musicals, romantic comedies, war pictures, and fantasy films. It's not too much to say that in this era filmmakers went flashback-goofy.

Studying the proliferation of flashbacks in this era can teach us a great deal about them as a resource of narrative at any time. Although the 1940s didn't invent the flashback, writers and directors of the period twisted it into fresh shapes, and those are being repurposed in our movies today.

STARTING AT THE FINISH

The trend began early in the decade. Between August 1940 and December 1941, every top studio tried out flashbacks in a major release: *The Great McGinty* (Paramount), *Kitty Foyle* (RKO), *I Wake Up Screaming* (Fox), *H. M. Pulham, Esq.* (MGM), and *Strawberry Blonde* (Warners). A May review of 1941 claimed that the "retrospective viewpoint" technique "had of late become commonplace."[3] In June Hedda Hopper counted half a dozen flashbacks in the season so far.[4] "Life travels so fast nowadays," complained a *Variety* columnist in the same month, probably referring to

Citizen Kane, "that a motion picture starts at the finish and flashes back to the hero's youth as an aftermath."[5] By September 1941 a critic considered the technique overused.[6]

Flashbacks were rare in the 1930s, as historian Maureen Turim has pointed out.[7] Screenwriter Wells Root recalls that studios sometimes forbade writers to use them.[8] F. Scott Fitzgerald seems to have considered the lengthy flashback in his screenplay *Infidelity* (1938) fairly risky.[9] From 1942 through 1950, however, the studios released at least twenty-five flashback features each year. As an absolute percentage of the industry's annual output of five hundred to seven hundred features, the number is minuscule, but it nonetheless stands out in contrast to the previous decade. A single year, 1944, boasted more flashback features than did the whole of the 1930s.

More important, many flashback films were prominent ones. While flashbacks in the 1930s were chiefly relegated to B pictures, during the next decade they featured in A pictures as well. After *Wuthering Heights* (1939) won several Academy Awards, flashbacks became something of a mark of prestige. The Oscar contenders of 1941 included *Citizen Kane*, *Hold Back the Dawn*, and *How Green Was My Valley*; the last won Best Picture. Throughout the decade, the use of flashbacks did not prevent *Casablanca* (1943), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *Mildred Pierce* (1945), *Spellbound* (1945), *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), *Crossfire* (1947), and *The Snake Pit* (1948) from being nominated for Best Picture and occasionally winning. At the end of the decade, two unusually complex flashback films, *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949) and *All about Eve* (1950), scored top Academy honors.

Filmmakers seemed besotted. After Warners producer Jerry Wald saw *Double Indemnity*, he announced, "From now on, every picture I make will be done in flashback."[10] Remakes added flashbacks to the originals, notably *Waterloo Bridge* (1931, 1940) and *Roxie Hart* (1942, a remake of *Chicago*, 1928). *A Woman's Face*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Mildred Pierce*, *The Big Clock*, *Madame Bovary*, *I Wake Up Screaming*, and other literary adaptations became flashback movies. Hemingway's brief flashback in the "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" was expanded to consume most of the plot in *The Macomber Affair* (1947). Selznick

initially wanted three flashbacks in *Since You Went Away* (1944), even at the cost of swelling the film to four hours.[11]

Executives, writers, and directors began discussing the best ways to rearrange chronology. Planning *Leave Her to Heaven* (1946), Darryl Zanuck and Otto Preminger debated the best point of attack: What scene should frame the film's return to the past?[12] Preston Sturges's *The Great Moment* (1944) was designed with a complicated flashback layout. It was recut by the studio, but the final version yielded a different, no less unusual timeline. One producer, adapting a Cornell Woolrich novel, ordered up two screenplays, one that followed the book's flashback structure and another that was more linear, because "the market is glutted with flashback pictures."[13]

Naturally there was resistance. Leo McCarey, John Ford, Howard Hawks, and other filmmakers of the period largely avoided the device. When Selznick considered including scenes of the title character in *Rebecca* (1940), Hitchcock replied, "Flashback? Ugh!"[14] Adapting the novel *All the King's Men*, writer-director Robert Rossen wanted to respect the novel's flashback structure, but studio boss Harry Cohn forbade it, saying that ordinary viewers were confused by discontinuous storytelling.[15] The distaste was shared by some in the press. *Citizen Kane*'s flashbacks were called difficult and disruptive.[16] Although the *Los Angeles Times* critic admired *Double Indemnity*, he confessed, "I am sick of flash-back narration and I can't forgive it even here."[17]

The most extensive critique came at the end of the decade, when the minor screenwriter Lewis Herman declared the device useful only for mystery plots. He argued that usually a flashback slowed momentum and lost suspense. Too often the plot played down the principal action in favor of present-time telling or recalling, highlighting minor characters reporting on the doings of major ones. Worse, flashbacks were too easy. The device, Herman concluded, was cheap. "The flash back is flashy."[18]

The objectors were fighting a losing battle, though, because flashbacks were firmly entrenched in other narrative arts. In a way, 1940s Hollywood was simply catching up with traditions in adjacent media. Flashbacks in literature stretch back to ancient Egyptian narrative, the *Odyssey*, and biblical tales. Nineteenth-

century novels, both literary and popular, employed the device. Modernist fiction made time juggling commonplace, and the strategy filtered into mass literature as well. Horace McCoy's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1935) framed a dance marathon ordeal with glimpses of the future, in which a judge sentences the protagonist to death. *That Flannigan Girl* (1939), a novel of Hollywood, alternates the shooting of a film in 1938 with chapters tracing the rise of the female star. Pulp stories had recourse to flashback construction too, as in Don Tracy's *Criss Cross* (1934) and *Round Trip* (1934).

The device wasn't so common on the stage, but as early as Edward Sheldon's *Romance* (1913), a long central flashback was framed by a prologue and an epilogue. Elmer Rice's *On Trial* (1914) attracted attention for its nonchronological dramatizing of witnesses' testimony.[19] As we've seen, the Stage Manager of the play *Our Town* (produced 1938) interrupts George and Emily's wedding to reenact their first confession of love. Flashback technique was important in radio drama, which frequently relied on a narrator reflecting on incidents in the past.[20] Arch Oboler's and Orson Welles's 1930s programs made daring use of flashbacks. By the time flashbacks took over moviemaking, audiences were well prepared to understand them.

In parallel with the fashion in Hollywood, several Broadway successes, from *I Remember Mama* (1944) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) to *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and *Edward, My Son* (1949), presented more or less stylized versions of characters' recollections, often with narrators accompanying the action. Some plays deployed such frequent shifts of time and locale that we might suspect the influence of cinema. An early version of *Glass Menagerie* took shape as a screenplay. Robert Penn Warren turned his 1946 novel *All the King's Men* into a play with over twenty scene changes.[21] *I Remember Mama* mimicked cinematic technique in its complicated staging, with two revolving turntables and over a hundred blackouts to allow rapid changes of scene.[22]

Mass-market storytelling continued to rely on flashbacks throughout the 1940s. Historian Neil Verma has found that over two hundred installments of the radio program *Suspense* began by launching a flashback.[23] Best-selling novels like Eric Knight's *This*

Above All (1941), Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943), Louis Bromfield's *Mrs. Parkington* (1943), Ben Ames Williams's *Leave Her to Heaven* (1944), J. B. Priestley's *Bright Day* (1946), and Mary Jane Ward's *The Snake Pit* (1946) showed that readers could take suitably signaled time shifts in their stride. Echoing *Citizen Kane*, *A Lion Is in the Streets* (1945), by Adria Locke Langley, begins with the funeral of a corrupt politician and then revisits the past when phrases in a radio tribute prod his widow's memory. Several of these books became films.

Alongside these middlebrow entertainments, there came thrillers and mystery novels with intricate time schemes. Jim Thompson's hard-boiled *Nothing More Than Murder* (1949) and Evelyn Piper's *The Motive* (1950) rely on flashback architecture. Chris Massie's *Green Circle* (1943) features symmetrically embedded flashbacks, and Joel Townsley Rogers's *The Red Right Hand* (1945) multiplies time shifts to the point of bewilderment.

In sum, flashbacks became common tools of storytelling throughout high-, low-, and middlebrow culture.[24] By 1951 a how-to article was advising novice writers that flashbacks big or small, scattered or in blocks, were a necessary component of fiction.[25] Most filmmakers today would agree. Yet when every young director, influenced by *Pulp Fiction* (1994) or *Memento* (1999) or *21 Grams* (2003), wants to chop linearity to bits, we may find the objections of Herman and others appealing. Flashbacks can seem a tiresome dodge.

During the 1940s, however, flashback plotting was more than a fashion. Its proliferation in all genres encouraged filmmakers to probe a range of creative possibilities. A flashback, it became evident, could yield a complex experience for the viewer. And because the device caught on so quickly, it set up a dynamic we'll see throughout this book: a challenge to compete within the bounds of classical storytelling. The task for the ambitious moviemaker is to come up with variants—switcheroos, again—that reveal fresh possibilities while still keeping the story clear enough to be understood by a mass audience. The expansion of flashback options neatly illustrates the variorum quality of 1940s Hollywood, as of popular cinema generally.

A NEW VIRTUOSITY

In cinema's earliest years the term flashback sometimes referred to crosscutting: we "flash" from one line of action to another, then "flash back" to the first one. Still, from the late 1910s on, we find the term used in our modern sense as well.[26] For a time in the 1930s and 1940s, "retrospect" was a synonym, but it died out. By 1940 both the term and the practice were well established.

Silent cinema relied on flashbacks of all types, from brief reminders of earlier scenes to more complex constructions. Probably the most famous instance of the latter is Victor Sjöström's *Phantom Carriage* (1921), which included flashbacks within flashbacks. An American instance is *Beau Geste* (1927), which followed the original novel's shifts in time and point of view fairly closely. Filmmakers of the silent era laid out some standard templates that would survive for decades: the condemned man recalling events leading up to his crime (*Silence*, 1926); a soldier on the battlefield remembering peacetime (*Forever After*, 1926); a defendant in court musing on her past (*The Woman on Trial*, 1927); a drowning man recalling his life (*The Last Moment*, 1928).[27]

Although flashback construction was rare in 1930s features, we find some adventurous uses of the device. In *Beyond Victory* (1931), four soldiers under fire recall, in turn, how they came to be in the trenches. Bolder were the flashbacks to investigation testimony in *The Phantom of Crestwood* (1932). *Variety*'s reviewer found this film "the heaviest use of this device since the talking picture came to the fore."[28] *Two Seconds* (1932) showed an executed man's last moments as he remembers his life. Josef von Sternberg, who had used flashbacks powerfully in *The Last Command* (1928), jammed several into the first forty-five minutes of *The Devil Is a Woman* (1935). The 1931 remake of *Silence* has the prisoner recounting past events to a priest, rather than simply remembering them as the accused heroine of *Midnight Mary* (1933) does. The 1939 remake of *Beau Geste* respected the overlapping time frames and disparate viewpoints that were on display in the silent version.

Above all, there was *The Power and the Glory* (1933). Preston

Sturges's screenplay remains a remarkable piece of construction. The tycoon Thomas Garner has just died, and his friend and assistant Henry tries to justify Garner's life in a conversation with his wife. Henry's flashbacks jump back and forth along two parallel tracks: Tom's early days, as he rose to success with the help of his wife, Sally, and his last days, when he fell in love with Eve, a superficial young woman. The two phases of Garner's life are presented in chronological order, but episodes are sharply contrasted.[29] We see the young Tom falling in love with Sally, then the older Garner being smitten by Eve. Then Henry's voice-over commentary segues back to Tom and Sally's early married life. Likewise, the sequence showing the birth of the couple's son Tommy is followed by a segment devoted to Garner's and Eve's wedding, with Tommy as best man. The bold double-entry format of *The Power and the Glory* seems to have remained unique in its day.

The silent days and the 1930s, then, can't be considered primitive compared with what came later. As with most narrative techniques I'll be analyzing, nearly every striking case we can find in the 1940s has some precedents. But in the forties the flashback became far more common, and it invited filmmakers to experiment. A powerful and original treatment of the technique became a mark of prestige, even virtuosity, to a degree we don't find earlier.

The splashiest flashback film of its time owes a good deal to its forebears, but it also gained a unique stature. *Citizen Kane* was recognized as extraordinary, and its flamboyance of plot and style was both celebrated and deplored. From our standpoint, *Kane*'s flashback construction can be seen as one crystallization of possibilities already opened up in film, radio, theater, and other media.

Kane's central premise—a dead man's life is recalled by others—had been rehearsed in *The Power and the Glory* and in *The Life of Vergie Winters*, which begins with a funeral procession and flashes back to the start of a backstreet love affair. *The Escape* (1939) centers on a doctor who tells a crime reporter about a recently deceased neighborhood gangster.

These earlier examples stick to a single teller, while *Kane* offers reports on its dead man from five characters. Here again,

however, there are precedents. Multiple tellers recounting events in flashback were staples of Hollywood courtroom dramas.[30] *Kane* assembles views on a person rather than evidence of a crime, but playwrights had tried out what screenwriter Herman Mankiewicz had called the "prismatic" approach to an absent central character.[31] Sophie Treadwell's play *Eye of the Beholder* (1919) portrays an offstage woman as seen through the eyes of her former husband, her lover, her lover's mother, and her own mother. The play *These Few Ashes* (1928) presents the life of a (supposedly) dead roué through the recollections of three women. Welles's radio programs had welcomed multiple storytellers as well, sometimes embedding them within one another's tales, sometimes letting them banter with each other.[32]

Then there's reporter Jerry Thompson's investigation. *The Power and the Glory*'s exhumation of the tycoon's past is presented simply as his old friend's recounting; there's no mystery to be solved. *Kane* innovated in the biographical film genre by creating curiosity based on the dying man's last word, "Rosebud." That device takes us to the terrain of the detective story. The dying message had become a mystery-tale convention from Conan Doyle onward.[33]

In blending conventions from several genres, *Kane*'s plot motivates the flashbacks on diverse grounds. The film's detective-story side is anticipated by *The Phantom of Crestwood* and *Affairs of a Gentleman* (1934); in both, flashbacks represent the suspects' answers under questioning. As something of a newsman movie, *Kane*, like *The Escape*, uses a reporter's search for a story to justify its flashbacks.[34] And as something of a biopic, Welles's film can trace the rise of a great man from the vantage point of old age, as in *Edison, the Man* (1940).

Significantly, *Kane*'s flashback organization skips around in the past. Episodes of *Kane*'s life are not presented in 1-2-3 order. Nonchronological strings of flashbacks weren't common in film, but *The Trial of Vivienne Ware* and *The Power and the Glory* used them significantly. Plays set in courtrooms, such as Rice's *On Trial*, had rendered flashbacks out of sequential order, and so had radio dramas. Welles's 1938 radio adaptation of *Dracula* shuffled episodes in the manner of the source novel.

Kane has occasion to present a brief replay from differing character viewpoints. Susan's opera premiere is first treated quickly, via a stagehand's scornful gesture. Later, in her flashback, we see the action as several characters, including Susan, react to it. Replay flashbacks were very rare in the 1930s, although *The Witness Chair* (1936) provides one example. After *Kane*, they would become more common.

Even the *coup de théâtre* of following Kane's death with a newsreel can be seen as revising a schema. *News on the March* isn't exactly a flashback, but it provides exposition by hopscotching among time periods in a manner characteristic of the film to come.[35] Projected headlines and documentary footage, faked or actual, had found their way into 1930s theater practice, from the WPA Living Newspaper productions to Sidney Kingsley's *Ten Million Ghosts* (which Welles performed in).[36] Many 1930s films opened with montage sequences using headlines, stock footage, and voice-overs like those in newsreels; *The Roaring Twenties* (1939) is a bold example. *Gabriel over the White House* (1933), with its mix of library footage and staged shots, anticipates *Kane* somewhat, as does Welles's script for an uncompleted 1939 RKO project, *The Smiler with a Knife*, which includes a newsreel surveying the career of the fascist villain.[37]

It takes nothing away from *Kane*'s originality to see it as a blend of schemas that had been circulating for some years in popular media and high culture. Welles draws on his predecessors (and himself) for formal devices; the result blends and exaggerates and sometimes surpasses its sources. Because of their film's prestige, Welles and Mankiewicz gave complicated time shifts a new prominence in Hollywood filmmaking.

THE SHAPES OF TIME

In any period, Hollywood flashbacks don't necessarily represent a character's memory. Some flashbacks aren't motivated as recollections, and many that are will show us things the character didn't or couldn't know. A flashback's basic purpose is to present story events out of chronological order. Those events explain why or how something happened.

Why would storytellers, in cinema or other media, want to skip back in time? Flashbacks typically create two sorts of effects. In the prototypical case, a flashback answers questions about how something in the present-time action came about. Accordingly, the film will reveal earlier events we haven't already seen.

Alternatively, a flashback can remind us of something we've already seen or heard. At the climax of *Hangover Square* (1945), as George Bone frantically plays his concerto and the police close in on him, a rapid montage recalls moments in and around the murders he committed. Reminding us of past events has obvious advantages of emphasis, especially in subjective sequences probing the mind of a haunted character like Bone.

The reminder flashback was common in silent cinema. The most famous example is probably the moment in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) showing Margaret Cameron wooed by a Northern suitor. When she hesitates, Griffith cuts back to her brother's death on the battlefield. It isn't exactly her memory (she wasn't there to witness his death), but it reiterates her continuing bitterness about the Union victory's toll on her family. In sound films, purely auditory flashbacks can momentarily hark back to scenes shown earlier. Nan, the imprisoned heroine of *City Streets* (1931), broods about her boyfriend's return to the beer racket, and over her face we hear snatches of earlier dialogue between them. Sitting in the booth she once shared with her lover, Kitty Foyle drinks wine that recalls his proposal to her, and we hear it as well.

Revelation flashbacks and reminder flashbacks can blend to create the replay flashback. Here we revisit incidents we have already seen or heard (so it's a reminder), but we also learn about aspects of the action that weren't previously shown (so it's a revelation too). Typically this is a gap-filling gesture: the filmic narration has omitted something on the first pass. For example, in *The Witness Chair*, a few moments missing from one piece of trial testimony are filled in when a replay dramatizes the witness's full confession. *Black Angel* (1946) does much the same thing through memory, and with typical forties bravado.[38]

Replay flashbacks were tempting options, but they were often considered a waste of time. George Cukor claimed he wanted a replay in the witnesses' testimony of *A Woman's Face*.[39] Joseph

Mankiewicz filmed a replay from different characters' viewpoints in *All about Eve* (1950), but it was eventually excised.[40] According to a biographer of Herman Mankiewicz, Welles wanted *Citizen Kane* to include long replays that would present contradictory action and lines of dialogue, to convey conflicting memories of what Kane did and said.[41]

Still, the replay gained some prominence in the 1940s. The prototypical case is *Mildred Pierce* (1945), where the murder that opens the film is revisited in flashback to reveal the real killer. The device was available to B films as well. *Crime Doctor's Warning* (1945) uses a replay flashback (solicited under hypnosis) to show that a shadowy figure we thought was one character was actually another.

Reminders and replays often tend to be short, while revelation flashbacks can be any length. This option reminds us that flashbacks can vary a lot in size. Some are very brief, perhaps consisting of only a shot or a line of dialogue. Others constitute single scenes, as with trial testimony. Still others, like the "we'll always have Paris" passage in *Casablanca* (1943), run for a few scenes. And some are quite long, with a few large ones or even a single one consuming the bulk of the running time. These "architectural" flashbacks can become the major parts of the film, with present-time scenes largely serving as connective material. Indeed, the tendency to treat flashbacks as the pillars of the plot is distinctive of 1940s dramaturgy and yields some of the era's most memorable movies, from *Citizen Kane* to *All about Eve*.

If the purpose of a flashback is to rearrange the chronology of story events to achieve particular effects on the viewer, we can ask how that rearrangement gets motivated. As a first approximation, we can distinguish nondiegetic options from diegetic ones: that is, motivation from outside the story world and motivation from within it.

Nondiegetic motivation is common today. By convention we have come to accept that the overall filmic narration may scramble episodes at will, as when chapter titles break up *Pulp Fiction*'s timeline. Here no one in the fictional world is telling or recalling events in the past. Again, this tactic was anticipated in the silent cinema, when a series of titles shift us backward in time, as in

Beau Geste. In the 1939 remake, the external "voice" is an intertitle that interrupts in a similar way: "About fifteen years earlier in England . . . at Brandon Abbas." A more equivocal case occurs in *A Man to Remember* (1938), which departs from the present when city fathers open the strongbox left behind by a deceased doctor. No voice-over explicitly recalls Doc's life, although there's a sense that this shift to the past represents the men's collective discovery of his value to the town.

This lack of diegetic motivation for a flashback is rare in early sound cinema, but it becomes more common in the 1940s. The prototype is that convention of semidocumentary film, the external voice-over narrator. In *Back to Bataan* (1945), a peremptory Voice of God tells us, reportage style, what led up to the US victory we see at the start. More abrupt is the intrusion of such a voice in *Confidence Girl* (1950). After a mind-reading stunt in a nightclub, the impersonal narrator interrupts the action to provide a replay flashback showing how the trick was done.

RECOUNTING, RECALLING, AND IN BETWEEN

Most flashbacks in 1940s films aren't nondiegetic intrusions into the story chronology. Almost invariably the time shift is triggered by a character who recounts or recalls the past. (Very rarely flashbacks issue from noncharacter story elements, as we shall see in *Ringside*.) My prototype at the start of the chapter is an example, with the track-in to a woman lost in thought.

It's worth pausing on the two options. In recounting, the character tells a listener or reader or public gathering about events in the past. These are dramatized in images and sounds. For example, in *Tight Shoes* (1941), a reporter explains to his pals how pinching shoes helped him score a story. By contrast, the recall flashback is motivated as memories in a character's mind, usually accompanied by a voice-over. In *The Hard Way* (1943), a woman who has tried to drown herself is lying in her hospital bed and thinking about what brought her here. The recalled flashback has a private dimension that can reveal a growth in awareness. The recounted flashback typically gains some of its force from the reactions of the characters who receive it.

In literature, recounted and recalled flashbacks can be colored by the personality of the character, especially if the writer has used first-person narration. Archie Goodwin's voice in Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe novels permeates his descriptions, the reported conversations, and the selection of information. In 1940s film, most flashbacks aren't usually refracted so markedly through the consciousness of the source character.

In fact, film flashbacks are oddly unliterary in being freed from the character recalling or recounting them. A novel's flashback is traditionally confined to the knowledge of the character experiencing it. A literary character can't tell or recall events she hasn't experienced at first or second hand. By contrast, a film flashback is almost never restricted to what a character could plausibly know. It may mark a stage in the character's awareness, but it rarely does so through rigid attachment to that character only.

There are exceptions, as when *Murder, My Sweet* (1944) and *Dead Reckoning* (1947) strain to keep the telling or remembering character present for everything we see in the past. In preparing the *Kane* screenplay, Welles and Mankiewicz worried about deviations from what the various narrators could have known.[42] But few films resort to such an alibi. In almost every sustained flashback in classical Hollywood films, things take place that the speaking or recalling character didn't or couldn't know about. The default mode in such films is objective, strategically unrestricted narration, with no apologies. This convention confirms the primary purpose of a flashback: rearranging the order of story events, not confining us to a single character's range of knowledge.

The same porousness of cinematic narration permits a film to combine recounting and recalling. *The Glass Menagerie* is framed as the son Tom's private flashback during his days at sea, enhanced by voice-over. Within that frame, another flashback presents Tom's mother recounting incidents involving her suitors.[43] Not surprisingly, even though the film is framed as Tom's memory, many things occur in "his" flashback that he wasn't present to witness.

Both recallings and recountings are often anchored in certain prototypical situations, most obviously interrogation. A trial or

a police investigation obliges people to tell about events in the past, so mystery films abound with recounted flashbacks. Some recount past events in 1-2-3 order while others, even B films like *Behind Green Lights* (1946), break up chronology.

When trial dramas made their way into early talkies, critics seemed to suggest that audiences would have trouble adjusting to the convention of flashback testimony.[44] By 1941, however, viewers had no problems with the ten flashbacks packed into *A Woman's Face*, with one pulled out of chronological order. The film likewise shows the growing penchant for courtroom scenes; neither the original play nor the original Swedish movie is structured as trial testimony via flashbacks.

The trial template was flexible. It could absorb a typical crime story line (*They Won't Believe Me*, 1947) or a literary adaptation like *Madame Bovary*; in the film Flaubert recounts the plot of his novel during his trial for indecency. *None Shall Escape* (1944) anticipates a postwar tribunal at which Nazis are accused, in flashbacks, of war crimes. But the device risked becoming a cliché. By 1948 a trade paper could complain of the "trite courtroom-to-flashback pattern" of *I, Jane Doe* (1948).[45] Hitchcock's trial scenes in *The Paradine Case* (1947) won praise for their refusal to dramatize testimony.[46]

Another recounting scenario lets one character confide in another. The sense of voluntarily sharing a secret lends an intimacy that is usually lacking in a formal inquiry. This is the format of *The Power and the Glory*, when the tycoon's assistant and boyhood friend convinces his wife that she has judged the dead man too harshly. Letters and diaries, almost invariably accompanied by voice-over, can launch a flashback as well. The memoir in *Keys of the Kingdom* (1945) presents a priest's missionary career, while the message in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948) stirs a casual seducer to regret and remorse.

Recollection has its prototypical situations as well. One is the deathbed, as in *The Hard Way*. In *The Big Shot* (1940), a dying gangster revisits his past. An extreme instance occurs in the B picture *Scared to Death* (1947), in which doctors bend over the body of a dying woman and she "recalls" what led up to her demise. (The title gives a hint.)

Another standard trigger for memory flashbacks is isolation. The character sits in a room or paces the floor or settles down in a park or forest, and the solitude provokes a return to the past. The tormented reporter of *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940), caged in his apartment, is plagued by flashbacks to clashes with his obnoxious neighbor Meng. Even on a crowded street, a moment of detached reverie can set the stage for remembering, as when the officer recalls his tragic love affair in the opening of *Waterloo Bridge*. A character sitting down to write, as at the start of *I Remember Mama* (1948), is a standard cue for a recall flashback. It's as if Hollywood can't let the story slow down to dwell on any action that isn't charged with psychological meaning. If there isn't dialogue and conflict "outside," there had better be monologue and psychic tension within.

Recounting and recalling are the twin poles of traditional flashback framing, but no less traditional is the urge to move beyond them into a no-man's-land. Sometimes it seems that the character is neither quite recounting (no listener is shown) nor quite remembering (the voice-over is too well shaped, even rhetorical). We know who is "having" the flashback, but we don't know who, if anyone, is being addressed. At the start of *How Green Was My Valley*, the grown-up Huw Morgan's voice announces that he is leaving the valley. At the end he asserts, "Men like my father can never die." Huw's narration isn't addressed to another character, but his declarations would seem oratorical for an inner monologue.

This unsituated character-based commentary gave cinema some of the discursive freedom of literature, which often presents first-person narration without explaining whom the narrator is addressing. In 1940s cinema, and not just in the United States, this manner of handling flashbacks became a common cinematic resource.

THE VIEWER'S SHARE

All these formal dimensions of the flashback—recounting and recalling, providing revelations or reminders or replays—open up a huge variety of possible effects. Some commenters may have

disparaged time-shifting tales, but filmmakers showed that the flashback could engage viewers in vivacious ways.

Most simply, a scene in the present arouses curiosity about how something came about, so the flashback, quickly or slowly, answers that question. It makes the plot cohere in terms of cause and effect. We know at the start of *Cheers for Miss Bishop* (1940) that the elderly heroine has never married her doting friend Sam. Why not? The opening of *Leave Her to Heaven* shows the protagonist returning from prison and taking a boat to meet an unseen woman. What sent him to jail, and whom will he meet?

These framing situations are stable and nonthreatening, posing their questions mildly. By contrast, in a tactic that became widespread in the 1940s, a flashback can be launched from a point of crisis. If *Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman* (1947) were to present its story events in order, we'd have an initial half-hour of things going very well, with almost no conflict. It's far more engaging to start with our heroine wrapped in bandages and moaning, before she recalls how she wound up in the hospital.

Starting the film near the story's climax and then skipping back to provide slow-paced exposition has a double benefit. It teases our curiosity about how we got here, and when that is more or less satisfied, we can look forward to an exciting resolution. The flashbacks in films like *The Big Clock* and *D.O.A.* (1950) delay a life-or-death outcome. As they unfold, they provide a double layer of uncertainty: we want to know what happens next in the flashback (microlevel uncertainty) and what will ultimately happen in the frame story (at the macro level) Once we're familiar with the heroine's descent into alcoholism in *Smash-Up*'s flashback, we can look forward to seeing whether she will survive.

Sometimes the film can exploit the doubled time scheme by being rather unspecific about the framing situation. *Pittsburgh* (1942) starts with two pals celebrating the success of their coal-mining business. Their mentor points out that they owe it all to Josie, the woman seen in a portrait in their office. His voice-over narration accompanies a series of flashbacks showing how the partners grew their business. But Josie is absent from the opening scene and from every return to the frame situation in the office. Is she dead? Has she abandoned the men who wooed her?

The question sharpens our expectations about what we see in the past.

A more teasing use of the ambivalent frame story occurs in *Roxie Hart* (1942). At a bar a reporter recounts the wild days of press mania, when Roxie was the murderess of the moment. His audience is a gravelly bartender. But during one flashback, the jury foreman at Roxie's trial is suddenly revealed as the very same bartender. Does the reporter telling the story not recognize him from the old days? And why is the bartender asking questions about Roxie, since he knows the answers very well? Enigmas like this heighten our curiosity about the framing action as well as the framed flashbacks.

Characterization can be enhanced by flashbacks. The brief scenes of domestic life before the war in *Tender Comrade* (1944) not only portray Jo's husband Chris as a decent, loving man but explain to us the source of her dogged energy. Without those brief flashbacks, neither Chris nor Jo would be as vivid. Likewise, an adaptation can use a flashback frame to give secondary characters a new prominence. Ernst Lubitsch's silent version of *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1926) centered on Lord and Lady Windermere and the threat to their marriage represented by Mrs. Erlynne and Lord Darlington. In *The Fan* (1949), Otto Preminger and his screenwriters set the frame in postwar London and depict the romantic tangle through the recounting of Darlington and Mrs. Erlynne, both in solitary old age. Since the Windermeres have died in the Blitz, the social comedy and happy ending of the original are replaced by a poignant sense of missed happiness. The flashback structure has turned secondary characters in the source play into major ones.

In *The Fan*, as often happens when the central action takes place in the distant past, the structure sharpens our sense of the change. Old people instantly become young again. A similar sharpening can take place with character development. A chronological plot can show how a character gradually changes, but a flashback-based plot can summon up a crisp before and after, or rather an after and before. *The White Cliffs of Dover* (1944) initially presents its heroine as a loyal friend of England during the Blitz. The shift to the past shows her to us as a proud Yankee, quickly

taking umbrage at British snobbery. The plot will trace how, by marrying a lord, she comes to love England as much as she loves America.

Less harsh are the character-trait shifts on display in *Pilot #5* (1943). A pilot is picked for a suicide mission, and his mates discuss what they know of him. One friend reveals him as an idealist, but another attests to his gradual corruption when he began working for a quasi-fascist governor. Another, more intimate friend is himself morally compromised, but he explains the circumstances that led to the pilot's embrace of the American cause. Despite being presented out of story order, the flashbacks add up to a portrait of a young man who strayed from democratic ideals but found his way back to them. This sort of film appeals to our intuition that human action is most fully understood in retrospect.

The "prismatic" flashbacks of *Pilot #5* are, we might say, midsize. Unlike the single long flashback that constitutes the bulk of *How Green Was My Valley* or *Smash-Up* or *D.O.A.*, midsize flashbacks often issue from different characters' accounts of story action. Occasionally, as in *Lady Be Good* (1941), the same character's testimony (in three separate court sessions) can emphasize parallel circumstances.

Midsize flashbacks can build up a sense of parallel blocks—chunks of action we're invited to compare. This effect is common in trial and investigation plots; we must weigh the different versions of events. Parallels also come to the fore in *Brute Force* (1947). Here four cellmates' plans for a prison break are interrupted by each man's account, dramatized in flashback, of how he ventured into crime. These parallel episodes have a characterizing function as well, since they invite us to observe that although each man has wound up in prison because of his blind devotion to a woman, their sacrifices show them to be rather different personalities.

MEMORY, MADE AND UNMADE

Flashbacks work quite directly on the viewer's memory. Once we're in a flashback, we may easily forget the frame, especially if the past-time action lacks voice-over accompaniment. Mod-

ern films often indicate flashback scenes with stylistic markers (slow motion, distorted imagery or sound, a different color palette, handheld footage), so that we're aware we're in the past. But 1940s films almost never did this, so it's even harder to maintain a sense that a flashback is distinct from its framing situation.

As a result, some films exploit our forgetfulness and simply never return to the framing action. The original script of *Guest in the House* (1944) contained a tidy frame, with a woman on a cliff recalling her involvement in a homicide and, at the end, giving herself up to the authorities.[47] As released, the film begins with the woman's recollection but never returns to the opening situation. Reviewers seem not to have noticed the anomaly.[48] Similarly, *I Wanted Wings* (1941) begins its flashback with a military board in closed session; the chairman is reviewing the evidence against a bomber pilot. But when we come out of the flashback, the bomber's pal is finishing up the story begun by the chairman. He entered the proceedings and began his testimony "behind" the flashback.

Because of the double layer of anticipation that flashbacks introduce—What will happen in the frame story? What will happen in the flashback?—it's possible to use them to enrich a story that is simple or diffuse. *Forever and a Day* (1943) is a family saga tracing the history of the Trimble mansion from 1804 to the nights of the London Blitz in World War II. Presented chronologically, the story would give equal weight to many generations and end, somewhat lamely, with the American heir coming to sell the home. Instead, the plot starts in the present with Gates Trimble arriving to sell the house and learning of the building's history through the young woman living there. The result is a tension—Will Gates decide to sell the old place?—and a budding romance. The flashback has enabled a rather episodic story action to be focused and given emotional resonance.

"I didn't get the money and I didn't get the woman," admits the insurance salesman Walter Neff at the start of *Double Indemnity* (1943). The flashbacks he narrates into a tape recorder create what might be called inevitability suspense: we will learn how Neff's fate unfolded. Unlike the similar James M. Cain adaptation, *Money and the Woman* (1940), which is told chronologically,

Double Indemnity uses the flashback to create the sort of "doom" plot associated with Cain's novels and film noir generally. (Cain wished he had thought of the tape recorder device.)[49] Flashbacks in other types of film are likely to prepare us for destiny from the beginning. The separation of the central couple is announced immediately in *Wuthering Heights* (1939), while the opening of *Lost Boundaries* (1949) assures us that community acceptance eventually awaits the black couple passing for white.

Flashbacks trade on what cognitive scientists call hindsight bias.[50] Once we know an outcome, we tend to think that it was obvious before the fact. Who couldn't see the 2008 financial crisis coming? By logical standards this isn't very good reasoning, but narrative plays on our folk psychology, not on strict rationality. Hindsight bias is thus a handy resource for story makers.

For example, a story told linearly might include a whopping coincidence. But begin your plot after the coincidence and flash back to it, and it will seem plausible, even inevitable, because it has "already" had consequences in the present. At the start of *The Strawberry Blonde*, we know that Biff did not marry the girl he yearns for. As a result, his accidental date with Amy seems inevitable; we know she will become his wife.[51]

Likewise, hindsight bias can engage us in fitting together bits of information introduced in the frame story. We get a sort of breadcrumb trail. The frame story of *The Long Night* (1947) begins near the story's climax. After establishing Joe's murder of Maximilian, the plot shows Joe holing up in his room, a classic isolation cue for recollection. When the flashbacks ensue, they explain the significance of objects that were highlighted in the opening tour of Joe's apartment. These items add mystery to the action—Why is a teddy bear important?—in a way that wouldn't happen if the plot were purely chronological. We enjoy seeing a diffuse pattern gradually become firm.

Accordingly, motifs in the frame story may be swiftly and discreetly planted. At the start of *Penny Serenade* (1941), Julie is about to leave her husband. She picks up an album of phonograph records. The film will be structured around her playing various records, each one evoking a particular moment in her marriage. She has decorated the album with keepsakes, and as she leafs through

it, we glimpse a birthday card, baby booties, and a travel folder from Japan, all of which prophesy action in the flashbacks. Most tellingly, on her way to the phonograph Julie passes a bedroom where a doll perches on the bed. At this point we're unaware that her daughter has just died, but the doll will reappear in one of the most poignant scenes in the past.[52]

The breadcrumb trail gets more elaborate in plots with lengthy setups. The framing situation of *The Searching Wind* (1946) lays out a host of clues that will be explained and developed in the embedded story. In 1945 Alex Hazen is a discharged ambassador. His son Sam has returned from the war with a damaged leg, and his wife Emily coasts along as a brittle socialite. Now that Alex is at liberty, he has a final chance to be united with Cassie Bowman, the liberal journalist he loves. At a tense reunion dinner, the three principals, along with Emily's father, Moses, try to explain to Sam how their lives have intertwined over the past twenty-three years.

The framing situation establishes Sam's troubled recovery from battle and Alex's confusion about his responsibility for America's failure to stop fascism. Sam wants to understand the compromises made by his father, his mother, and his grandfather (who laments the errors of the Treaty of Versailles). The central flashback, which takes up an hour of screen time, traces European history from Mussolini's march on Rome in 1923 through Hitler's rise, the Spanish Civil War, and the appeasement of Germany in 1938. Throughout these years Alex has been assigned to various countries, always reluctant to face Europe's march toward total war. Cassie loves him but recognizes his weakness as being both personal and symptomatic of the cowardice of international diplomacy.

The Searching Wind's present-time setup runs nearly thirty minutes and lays down a host of hints about the flashback. Packing up his things, Alex dwells fondly on an old photo of him with Cassie and Emily, but Emily laughs at their dated clothes. The moment characterizes him as regretful and her as superficial. He says he needs time to think, "to assess things and my part in them"; this what the evening ahead will do by force. Alex announces to Emily that he wants a divorce, and their conversation alludes to a promise made in Paris—one we'll see enacted in the

flashback. Cassie at work in the newsroom learns that Emily's father sold the newspaper company; in the flashback, we will learn why. Even small details, such as Cassie's dropping her purse when she comes to dinner, are explained in the flashback as her habitual signs of nervousness. As often happens, the frame story motivates our acceptance of a coincidence: Alex and Cassie rekindle their love as a result of a chance meeting during the bombardment of Madrid in 1936.

Given the interwoven lives of the characters, the transition to the long central flashback in *The Searching Wind* assumes an unusual form. As Sam sits at dinner, the camera moves up to isolate him, music comes in, and the image shimmers—all very traditional cues for the time shift. But as we watch Sam tensely waiting, we hear the voices of family members offscreen, speaking to one another in sentences beginning "I can remember . . ." The result is a sort of collective flashback, produced by the conversation.

Our return to the present is similarly marked by group recounting. As the flashback ends on Sam, listening, Grandfather Moses says, "There's no point in people sitting around the table talking about the past." Soon Sam will pass his own judgment: "You've all been sort of talking to yourselves." The climax shifts dramatic focus to Sam and the lesson he has learned about his elders' lack of vigilance.

The Searching Wind's source, Lillian Hellman's 1944 play, was an entry in the Broadway flashback vogue. The play's brief first scene, set in 1944 in the Hazen drawing room, plants some of the clues we note in the film's opening stretch, but there is no dinner table framing of the flashbacks. The film replaces the play's abrupt time shifts with a vague collective recounting. In the process, the film's expansion of the play's setup illustrates how a breadcrumb trail can drop many hints that will be taken up in the body of the past action. We'll see the same slow tease at work in *Body and Soul* (1947).

Itemizing all these advantages of flashbacks doesn't imply that every film would be improved by adding one. Most 1940s filmmakers avoided them because juggling time risked confusing the audience. One reviewer complained that the "episodic flashbacks" in *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1948) "make the story too

complex to be easily understood." The reviewer pointed out that the film had to be watched from the beginning "lest the confused story seem even more confusing."[53] In an era when theaters screened films nonstop, viewers who came in partway through might be baffled by time shifts.[54]

SCHEMA AND VARIATION

Only in the 1940s could Olive Higgins Prouty, author of the source novel for *Now, Voyager* (1942), suggest that the flashbacks to the heroine's youth be played as silent scenes with subtitles. Producer Hal Wallis rejected Prouty's suggestion: "I had visions of the entire audience moving quite rapidly into the street."[55] Nonetheless, a surprising number of films tweak flashback schemas in ways more peculiar than those we've seen so far.

Some large-scale flashbacks "lose the frame" by not returning to the narrating situation, as in *Guest in the House*. The use of parallel scenes can create a sort of surrogate frame. In *The Great Gatsby* (1949) the opening sequence shows Nick and Jordan, now middle-aged, at Gatsby's grave. We flash back twenty years, and within that stretch we get further flashbacks revealing Gatsby's past. At the climax, Gatsby is shot by the cuckolded gas station owner Wilson. At the burial Nick and Jordan meet at Gatsby's grave and vow to return to the Midwest. We never return to the 1948 situation that opened the film, but the couple at graveside in 1928 suffices to recall it and provide closure.

More striking and precise is the abandoned frame of *How Green Was My Valley*. The present-time opening shows a bleak, depopulated village scarred by the slag from the coal pits (fig. 2.1). As Huw wraps his belongings in his mother's shawl, he reflects on the past and carries us into his boyhood (fig. 2.2). At the end of the long flashback, cradling his dead father in his arms, the boy Huw ponders (fig. 2.3). Instead of returning to the opening frame, in which we would need to see Huw the man trudge out of his ruined village, the voice-over initiates a string of reminder flashbacks. The film plunges back into the best days of Huw's childhood, ending with images showing his father, his brothers, his sister Angharad, and the reverend Mr. Gruffydd, striding through

2.1. *How Green Was My Valley* (1941): The mining village today.

2.2. Huw and his father stroll through the village in happier times.

2.3. The end of the flashback: The death of the father.

2.4. After replays of scenes from happier times, the final shot of the epilogue loops back into Huw's memory, as if starting the flashback over again and never returning to the present-day frame.

the unspoiled valley (fig. 2.4). Locked in the past, *How Green* need never return to the desolate present, proving Huw's opening maxim: "You can go back and have what you like of it."

Sometimes we don't exactly return to the frame situation because the action in the flashback seamlessly catches up with the events first shown there. Examples are *The Bamboo Blonde* (1946), *The Return of January* (1948), and *Alias Nick Beale* (1949). At other times there seems to be a careful refusal to go back to the frame. That may be simple time saving. *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* (1950) presents a criminal trial, and one character's testimony will launch a flashback that is concluded by another character when we return to the trial. More strategically, the voice-over narration of the protagonist of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*

(1946) begins in the past as he describes what brought him to the lonely gas station. At the end, however, it's revealed that he is telling this story to a priest in his cell on Death Row. Cain claimed he could write first-person narration only if he could provide an actual scene of recounting; the film follows the novel by creating a surprise in revealing that scene.[56] If *Gatsby* and *How Green* lack a concluding frame, *Postman* lacks one up front.

Since flashbacks aim to explain the present by finding causes in the past, they're presumed to be reliable. Thanks partly to hindsight bias, they usually are. But doubt can arise when they're anchored in an investigation or a trial situation. Here the film may indulge in what Meir Sternberg calls "a rhetoric of anticipatory caution."[57] Because courts and police questioning are trying to ascertain the truth, there's always the possibility that one or more flashbacks may not be accurate.

For example, in the B picture *Backlash* (1947), which jams eight flashbacks into sixty-six minutes, a dramatized diary entry is incompatible with another (recounted) flashback; in the epilogue, the entry is revealed to be faked. More explicitly, the very title of *Thru Different Eyes* (1942) warns us to expect unreliable accounts. *Crossfire* (1947) arranges its flashbacks so that one witness or the other must be telling lies. Two lying flashbacks in *Phone Call from a Stranger* (1952) are marked not only by exaggerated performances and music but by dissolves that briefly turn the shot into a negative image. More diabolical is the famous lying flashback in *Stage Fright* (1950). The film's narration abandons the rhetoric of anticipatory caution and leads us to trust our first impressions.[58]

Then there's the strategy of using flashbacks to push the film toward calculated unintelligibility. Critic Manny Farber found *Murder, My Sweet* (1944) "by all odds the most incomprehensible film in years."[59] The basic story is familiar enough, centering on a treacherous woman covering up a murder she has committed. A typical investigation plot would dramatize for us how the femme fatale committed the crime. But the flashbacks in *Murder, My Sweet* show Philip Marlowe, under police questioning in the present, recounting how he *investigated* the case. To clarify the crime plot, the film would have to embed flashbacks within Marlowe's flashback, and these aren't supplied. We learn the backstory of

the woman's crime wholly through confessions blurted out at the climax. For this reason Farber wished he could take the movie's dialogue home "to study at length."

At least the flashbacks in *Murder, My Sweet* come from a single character and proceed in chronological order. *The Killers* (1946) provides a more mind-twisting intricacy. An insurance investigator discovers that Ole, the murdered Swede, was lured into a holdup, double-crossed by the boss's girlfriend, and eventually killed by hit men. The plot has eleven flashbacks, and, in terms of story chronology, they are presented in this sequence: 11-10-1-2-3-4-5-8-6-9-7. In addition, the testimony from witnesses erodes the framing situations somewhat. One past-time episode doesn't return to the charwoman who launches the tale, and another, mumbled by a dying hood, seems to be barely intelligible to the investigators.[60]

Or consider *Backfire* (1950). Bob Corey, a recovering veteran, is waiting for his army buddy Steve to take him out of the hospital. Instead, Bob gets a late-night visit from a mysterious woman, who he later suspects was a hallucination. When Bob is discharged the hospital, he learns that Steve has disappeared, probably because he was involved with a murder. Bob's search leads him to seven people who knew Steve, and the flashbacks enacting their reports run through story events in 3-5-2-4-1-6-7 order. The final, most recent episode explains why the woman visited Bob and what happened to her afterward. Critics praised *The Killers* and mostly castigated *Backfire*, but regardless of the responses, evidently no flashback movies from earlier eras, not even the early forties, play with chronology as freely as these two. They point forward to Stanley Kubrick's juggling of chronology in *The Killers* (1956) and the flashback mosaics of *The Pawnbroker* (1965) and *Petulia* (1968).

Time can get kinked even more aggressively when we have flashbacks embedded in other flashbacks. Sometimes these are pretty perfunctory, as in *I Love a Mystery* (1945), *Ladies of the Chorus* (1949), and *The Enforcer* (1951). As brief patches of exposition, they supplement the overall flashback. More ambitious embeddings form a quasi-geometrical pattern. The 1940s furnish two paradigm cases in which symmetrically parallel flashbacks are

neatly nested, like Russian dolls. One is *The Locket* (1947), which I'll have more to say about later. The other prototype is *Passage to Marseille* (1944), which lays out six years' worth of action with a kind of fanatical fussiness.[61]

The outermost frame story of *Passage to Marseille* opens with Manning, a war correspondent, visiting a camouflaged air base in the English countryside. From here Free French pilots launch bombing raids on Germany and occupied France. Struck by the intensity he sees on one gunner's face, Manning asks his host Freycinet about the man. Freycinet answers with "the story of a little group of whom Matrac was one."

First embedded flashback: Freycinet's story takes us back a few years to a French cargo ship, which rescues five men in a drifting boat. After Freycinet realizes they are convicts escaped from Devil's Island, the men start to recount how and why they got away.

Second layer of flashback: The convicts plot to escape and fight the Germans, but one—Matrac—withdraws to brood. We're confronted with a sharp disparity: the zealous anti-Nazi of the present-day frame story is reluctant to join the fight in the past. Then the prisoner Renault explains Matrac's story to the other prisoners.

Core flashback: In 1938, Matrac denounces the sellout to Hitler at Munich. Right-wingers smash his newspaper office while police and citizens look on passively. Having lost his faith in politicians and the people, Matrac flees Paris with his lover Paula. But he is arrested, tried on trumped-up charges, and sent to Devil's Island.

Return to the second layer, as the prisoners resume telling their tale to Freycinet: On Devil's Island, Matrac is tortured, intensifying his hatred for France and everything associated with it. Soon afterward, the five men escape. The old man who helps them asks only that they promise to serve French freedom. But Matrac refuses to pledge his loyalty. The disparity persists: What has turned this angry, disillusioned idealist into the dedicated gunner Manning sees in the opening scene?

Return to the first layer, as narrated by Freycinet: On the ship,

word comes that Marshall Pétain has signed an armistice with the Germans. The captain secretly swerves the ship away from Marseille, a Pétain-controlled city, and sets his sights on England. A fight ensues, with the crew and the Devil's Island brigade pitted against the pro-German officers. In the heat of the moment, Matrac's genuine patriotism surges back. He leads the battle to kill the Pétainists and, moved by a cabin boy's heroic death, vows to drive the enemy out of France.

Back in the frame story, all mysteries from the past have been cleared up. Now the journalist Manning appreciates what the pilots have sacrificed, and he understands what has turned Matrac into a fierce patriot. The film could close quickly here, but the plot sets up a fresh future-oriented suspense. Manning and Freycinet wait for the planes to return from the night's bombing run. Renault's plane, though, is delayed, and it brings back a fatally wounded Matrac. This time he has not been able to drop a message to Paula as his plane passes over their farm, but at Matrac's funeral, Freycinet assures everyone, "That letter will be delivered."

In *Passage to Marseille*, Matrac's 1938 adventure forms the core, wrapped in three layers. We have a flashback within a flashback within a flashback, the outermost one surrounded by a frame story set in the present. Dizzyingly, we have Freycinet recounting a story recounted by Renault, which includes another story recounted by Renault still further back in the past. Why build the movie's plot into a shape more complicated than in the source novel?[62]

For one thing, the embedded flashbacks refresh what had become a common wartime story schema, that of the self-centered man who learns that he must join the collective struggle against fascism. Matrac is played by Humphrey Bogart, who was associated with this conversion narrative in *All through the Night* (1941), *Casablanca*, and *To Have and Have Not* (1945). A linear conversion plot, such as that of *The Fighting 69th* (1940), tends to give us motives straightforwardly, and it explicitly traces the process of changing people's minds and hearts. A broken timeline creates more curiosity, as the Matrac we know at the start is very dif-

ferent from the Matrac presented in the flashbacks. What made him become a committed patriot? The Chinese-boxes layout of *Passage to Marseille* enhances puzzles of personality.

Still, there is something odd about this explanation of motives. Charles Foster Kane is also an enigmatic personality. Kane appears in most scenes of his film, yet Matrac is curiously absent from his. Matrac is initially glimpsed as the gunner in a bomber crew, but thereafter he vanishes for periods of ten or fifteen minutes. When Matrac reappears as one of the rescued convicts on the steamer, his presence is played down. He never recounts or recalls his past, and he remains a sullen, peripheral figure in the early shipboard scenes, turning away from the camera or sitting silently in the background. Not until forty-eight minutes into the film does the spotlight swivel to him, as Renault explain his backstory. One contemporary review noted that Claude Rains, who plays Freycinet, had the biggest part in the picture.[63]

Lewis Herman worried that recounted flashbacks shift too much weight to narrating characters. There's probably something to this: however much flashbacks would help iron out the plot of *The Big Sleep* (1945), they would deflect our attention from Marlowe's investigation and his sexual sparring with Vivian Sternwood. Still, *Passage to Marseille* makes a virtue of secondhand accounts by fleshing out Matrac's colleagues. Sharply contrasted with the Pétainist Duval, Freycinet emerges as a compassionate, good-natured man who can discern true patriotism, even in a convict. The Devil's Island escapees, all portrayed as men whose crimes were accidental, minor, or well justified, get vividly differentiated. Their escape is made possible by yet another side participant, Grandpère. He is a prisoner with privileges who yearns to fight for France but, because he would overload his comrades' canoe, stoically remains behind waiting to be recaptured. The convicts who survive the fight on shipboard remain central when we return to the frame story, where they play important roles in the Free French air campaign.

About halfway through *Passage to Marseille*, Matrac assumes a more central position, first as the one escapee who won't promise to fight for France, then as the leader of the shipboard skirmish. The film has filled itself with so much background informa-

tion about his comrades, the Free French, their strategies of air combat, and the milieu of Devil's Island that his story emerges as one among many. Its emblematic function is summarized in an epilogue in which Freycinet reads Matrac's final letter to his son. The embedded flashbacks not only expose the core events in the protagonist's personal life but situate him in a wider political struggle. This is indeed "the story of a little group of whom Matrac was one."

THE PAST IS PERSONAL

By the end of the 1940s, both A- and B-picture filmmakers could risk chopping up a linear plot through numerous flashbacks. The device could demote the protagonist from energetic agent to object of study, and it could expand the treatment of secondary characters. *Beyond Glory* (1948) affords a handy anthology of devices that over just a few years had become mainstream resources.

Told in chronological order, the action of *Beyond Glory* would trace how the military draft forces Rocky Gilman to give up a good job and a girlfriend. Despite rising to the rank of lieutenant, he is a little cynical about the army. During a battle in Tunisia, he suffers a concussion that delays his joining his superior, Harry Daniels, in an attack on a German tank. When Rocky comes to, his captain has been killed. Rocky takes out the tank, but he's unaware of the minutes he was unconscious. Convinced that he was too afraid to attack immediately, he leaves the hospital freighted with guilt over Harry's death. After a period of drifting at loose ends, Rocky becomes friendly with Harry's widow, Ann. He enters West Point as a cadet to atone for Harry's death.

In Rocky's fourth and final year, a young cadet convinces his influential father that Rocky has been bullying him. A hearing is held to probe Rocky's conduct and character. When his battlefield activity is brought up against him, Rocky resigns and tries to run off with Ann, who has come to love him. She refuses, sends him back to West Point, and testifies about their relationship. In the same session, Rocky's adopted father brings in the doctor who treated him. He attests to a gap in Rocky's experience of the Tunisian firefight. Another soldier who was in the unit states that

he now realizes Rocky must have been unconscious during the crucial minutes. The ornery cadet's father withdraws the charges, and Rocky is ready to graduate to a good job and a life with Ann.

So much for story-world chronology. But as one trade review noted, the plot layout of *Beyond Glory* provides "an interesting switch on the traditional treatment of war heroes."[64] The switch relies on presenting a crisis situation marbled with flashbacks from different phases of Rocky's military career.

We get a host of reminders, revelations, and replays. The plot starts near the end of the story's action, with the hearing into Rocky's conduct. Accordingly, the first clutch of flashbacks concentrates on charges that West Point is a brutal place where hazing is a matter of course. The complaining cadet, Ray Denmore, recounts incidents of Rocky's behavior, but his testimony is countered by Rocky's friend Eddie Loughlin, who establishes that Rocky's devotion to duty is unquestionable. These scenes skip back to Rocky's first days at the Academy. Loughlin drops important hints: Rocky had "something else to cope with—something pretty tough."

The familiar forties touch of mystery alerts us, although the authorities in the hearing seem oblivious. Instead, the investigation proceeds with Rocky's tight-lipped report on his being drafted and shipping out as a lieutenant. His testimony takes us still further back in time. He mentions the Tunisian battle briefly, leaving a notable gap to be filled by a later flashback. He then traces how he was discharged, returned to find his job and girlfriend gone, and decided, under the pressure of guilt on VE day, to visit Harry's widow.

Then Rocky signed up for West Point. Why? He will say no more.

New testimony from an orderly at the hospital carries us further back, to Rocky's days of recovery from combat stress. Under a drug, Rocky seems to confess dereliction of duty during the Tunisian firefight. "I was yellow." We're reminded that in his first days in the service he expressed the idea that disobeying an officer's order was sometimes a soldier's best option. As he leaves the hospital, he discards his Distinguished Service Cross, a gesture that seems to confirm his admission of cowardice under fire.

Now the narration becomes flagrantly suppressive. After a long day of testimony Rocky gets a letter from Ann, and he breaks West Point rules by visiting her at her apartment. We don't see the result of the visit, but next day he comes late to the hearing.

The first part of the film has used flashbacks to render Rocky largely from the outside. His behavior is described by Ray, Loughlin, and the orderly. His own testimony is flat and detached, with much material withheld "for personal reasons." As in *Passage to Marseille*, questions of loyalty linger. Early on, Rocky has expressed disdain for the military way of life. Why then did he sign up for the Academy and accept its stringent discipline? Why has he refused to defend himself under the attorney's grilling? And why has he returned after going AWOL? We'll learn in the final day's testimony.

Ann comes forward to testify and becomes the organizing center of the last section of the film. In a series of flashbacks running twenty minutes, she reviews events we've seen, but her information fills in gaps and traces a curve of change. She recounts how she met Rocky on VE Day and undertook to bring him back to normal life. But he follows her lead in his own self-lacerating manner: joining the Academy to assuage his guilt, "to pay his debt"—that is, compensate for his purported cowardice under fire. Ann sticks by him through three years of plebe life.

At this point Ann's flashbacks catch up with the time span of the hearing itself. Earlier in the film, we've seen Rocky break a date with her. This was the only moment we saw Ann during the first fifty minutes of the film. In her enacted testimony we again see Rocky break the date; the reminder stresses her puzzled reaction. On the following night Rocky calls on Ann, and now this repetition becomes a fleshed-out replay. It continues what had earlier been cut off: their confrontation, in which he asks her to flee West Point with him. She refuses and insists he return to the Academy.

Ann's flashback has humanized Rocky to a degree that his rigid self-presentation failed to do in the early stretches of the film. There remains only the question of what really happened in Tunisia. Rocky's doctor testifies, without benefit of flashback, that he felt there was a gap in events as officialdom knew them. Our old friend amnesia is waiting in the wings.

Then Rocky's friend Loughlin returns to the stand. Discussions with the doctor have led him to understand that Rocky got a concussion from the shelling. Loughlin hadn't realized this at the time because Rocky didn't know he'd blacked out. All that remains is for the young cadet Ray Denmore to admit he lied about Rocky's abuse. An epilogue presents General Eisenhower addressing the West Point cadets with a homily about the need for a first-rate military.

Beyond Glory, complained a critic at the time, moved "slowly and confusingly through a great many flashbacks."[65] True, there are ten flashbacks in a mere eighty-two minutes. But the purpose of the time shifts is strategic. As *Passage to Marseille* maps the wartime conversion narrative across many time shifts, this film splinters a familiar postwar story. The tale of a traumatized vet plagued by amnesia and guilt feelings is recast as a series of mysteries of both incident and character. What happened in the battle? Why is Rocky so remote, bitter, and laconic? These questions arise from a radical scrambling of chronology. The order of past incidents as we encounter them runs 10-9-8-1-4-3-5-6-7-2. Unlike *Passage to Marseille*, which exposes its protagonist's motivation in a central chunk of action, *Beyond Glory* reveals the critical event at the end.

The film sidles into Rocky's story by means of a secondary drama, the accusations of hazing at the Academy. This conflict does more than fill out the tale with the arresting West Point surroundings and an array of vivid secondary characters (Pop, the attorney Proctor, the supervising general). The hazing pretext permits the examination of Rocky's past via the familiar trial schema. Significantly, the inquiry is recast as a nonjudicial investigation; several times we're reminded that this hearing has much greater leeway than a court of law would. So it should, because it is explicitly investigating the sort of personality who ought to serve in the military.

Beyond Glory presents Rocky as moving from cynicism to a grudging acceptance of discipline and then to genuine commitment to service. By starting with the accusations of bullying, the plot contrasts him with the rich, shallow Ray. In the second half, Ann's tenderness toward Rocky further softens our attitude. If

this widow can forgive him, can't he forgive himself? Anyway, he turns out to be a genuine war hero.

Citizen Kane, another film that used time shifts and varying perspectives to probe changes in a personality, had blended 1930s devices into a new and striking flashback construction. By 1948, *Beyond Glory* was able to absorb and extend those devices. It constitutes an instructive anthology of techniques that had in just a few years slipped more or less comfortably into Hollywood's storytelling tradition.

The flashback vogue illustrates some key themes of this book's argument. The trend shows how quickly novelties get absorbed, revised, and elaborated. Critics were divided; some lamented "the flashback plague" and complained that films were becoming confusing, while others admired the skill with which different time frames were juxtaposed.[66] So quickly did flashbacks become a part of 1940s cinematic storytelling that films could distinguish themselves by not using them. A *Kane*-like investigation of a suspect tycoon in *Keeper of the Flame* (1942) confines itself wholly to the present, while the second remake of *The Trial of Mary Dugan* (1941), whose source play is a courtroom-flashback warhorse, conspicuously sticks to chronological order.

The viral spread of flashbacks also indicates how dependent filmic innovation became on mainstream versions of mildly modernist technique in literature, radio, and drama. Yet many adaptations, from *Our Town* to *Stage Fright*, are more than the sum of their influences. Dropping frame stories, mixing character viewpoints, leaving breadcrumb trails, creating embedded plots and scrambled timelines—all these tactics freshened up movie flashback schemas. In transposing literary devices to film, filmmakers revealed distinctively cinematic effects.

Flashback construction is so pervasive that our survey of other techniques will inevitably return to this central device. It can support further innovations, from subjectivity to block construction. Shuffling story events out of order seems a pretty simple creative choice, but it can have far-reaching results.

INTERLUDE

Kitty and Lydia, Julia and Nancy

FLASHBACKS ASKED AUDIENCES TO CREATE A PATTERN OF actions joining the past and the present. The device could also create more complex characterizations. If the results didn't prove "prismatic" in the strong sense of showing contradictory sides of a personality, flashback films did have the ability to sharpen character change more vividly than in more chronological storytelling. The changes in attitude tracked in *Passage to Marseille*, *Beyond Glory*, and other films show the possibilities of this approach to portraying character.

The examples I've considered in the previous chapter centered on stoic, emotionally inexpressive male protagonists like Matrac and Rocky Gilman. This is one traditional way of portraying men in popular media. What about the women?

The cultural stereotype of woman as a mysterious being, mercurial and unpredictable, unwavering when a mother but uncertain in young love, was also pulled into the flashback vortex. "Women's films" are often about critical decisions, personal secrets, and hidden vulnerabilities. If the men become opaque and need others to explain them (a comrade in *Passage*, colleagues and a girlfriend in *Glory*), female characters are often more confessional. This makes them ideal for flashback exploration. They take us through their search for happiness, their mistakes, their

impulsive decisions and later reconsiderations. Thanks to emerging flashback schemas, filmmakers could make fresh and compelling stories out of some stereotypes associated with women.

WOMAN, ACCEPTING LESS

Christopher Morley's 1939 best seller *Kitty Foyle* adapts the stream of consciousness technique of literary modernism to middlebrow fiction. This novel of an Irish girl in love with a scion of wealth presents its action in a torrent of free associations. What starts as a family memoir quickly becomes a cascade of memories from all phases of Kitty's life. Early on she is distressed by her father's death, but the scene of his dying is postponed for two hundred pages. Kitty's first-person narration flits to and fro across years and ends in a reader-friendly counterpart to Molly Bloom's monologue in *Ulysses*.

Two major screenwriters, Donald Ogden Stewart and Dalton Trumbo, turned Kitty's whirligig memories into something more linear.[1] First, they provided a deadline-driven crisis. Kitty, on the eve of her marriage to the idealistic doctor Mark, is visited by her old love, Wyn. He asks her to go off with him at midnight, but with the condition that he'll never divorce his wife. She accepts his terms and starts to pack. Then the flashbacks start, creating a sort of working girl's *Citizen Kane*.

Stewart and Trumbo give us two time-travel guides. As Kitty packs, she looks at the snow globe that once adorned her father's mantelpiece. She then finds her mirror reflection demanding she think over her decision (fig. KLJN.1). "You're making a mistake, you know." Mirror Kitty, an illusion wrought by RKO's superb special effects department, will furnish the film with a detached second-person narration. This analytical voice-over will review nine phases of Kitty's past. Meanwhile the globe accompanies the voice as a reminder of her father's advice not to mix with high society. Inside the snow globe a little girl rides a sled, raising her arms in triumph (fig. KLJN.2).[2]

A brief scene shows Kitty at fifteen, in awe at the sight of a Philadelphia society ball. The rest of the film dismantles these illusions about the upper crust, as the genial but weak Wyn falls in

KLJN.1. *Kitty Foyle* (1940): In the mirror, Kitty's better judgment tries to warn her.

KLJN.2. Inside the snow globe: the girl on the sled becomes fully visible only in the final moments of the film.

love with her but doesn't dare leave his family. The drama comes from the struggle between Kitty's love for him and her proud independence. After Kitty and Wyn have secretly married, she denounces his family's plans to "prepare her" to enter their class. She divorces Wyn, only to find herself pregnant. In the book she has an abortion; in the film the child dies at birth.

During periods of Wyn's inattention, Kitty has casually dated Mark, who has begun to practice medicine at a children's hospital. After her baby dies, she decides to accept Mark's marriage proposal. This is what leads into the film's opening stretch, when Wyn turns up as she's packing for the wedding.

The first few minutes prepare us to exercise hindsight bias. As Mark and Kitty are arranging the wedding trip, he asks if she's sure her old romance is over. Although she promises it is, we must be curious about what that love was like and whether it's indeed finished. The romance is rekindled by the surprise return of Wyn, and in trying to persuade Kitty to run off with him he mentions high points of their affair. He reminds her of their favorite restaurant, their attendance at a society ball in New York, and "those dreams we dreamed."

All these breadcrumbs will be picked up in the flashbacks. When Wyn proffers the ring she returned to him, we expect to learn its earlier significance at some point. Even Wyn's sudden reappearance in Kitty's life foreshadows a similar moment when, five years before, he burst in on her and disrupted her budding romance with Mark. In addition, the emergence of Mirror Kitty

KLJN.3. The snow globe is the lead-in to Kitty's flashbacks.

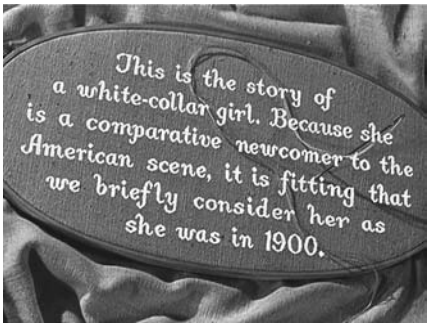
KLJN.4. Waiting for Wyn, Kitty spies the news of his engagement through the distorting lens of a carafe.

prepares us for all the mirror reflections and optical distortions we'll see in the past-time scenes (figs. KLJN.3 and KLJN.4). Above all, we know before the flashbacks start that young Kitty's effort to make a life with Wyn in the flashback scenes will fail. This is the familiar hindsight bias created by starting near the climax of the story action.

The frame story sets up romantic drama's conventional choice between a solid, somewhat dull citizen and a dazzling but unreliable playboy. Before Wyn intrudes on Kitty in the opening, she helps Mark deliver a child in a tenement apartment. The image of Kitty holding the baby anticipates her ultimate alliance with Mark, a man devoted to children and one who can fulfill the deepest need she declares: to be a mother. For all her fiery independence, Kitty wants a home and a family, and those she can never have as Wyn's mistress.

It's this tension, I think, that explains the curious prologue added by the script. It's 1900, and expository intertitles on an image of an embroidery sampler tell us of changes in women's estate (fig. KLJN.5). In pantomime reminiscent of silent cinema, we see a woman gallantly given a seat on a crowded streetcar, serenaded by a swain with a ukulele, and, now married, preparing to have a child (fig. KLJN.6). These glimpses of feminine gentility are interrupted by a scene of suffragists proclaiming their rights. The message is plain: Now women must fight for a seat on a trolley, and men no longer line up to court them.

A working girl must struggle to find the right mate. She may


This is the story of
a white-collar girl. Because she
is a comparative newcomer to the
American scene, it is fitting that
we briefly consider her as
she was in 1900.

KLJN.5. Kitty's efforts at independence are given a historical backstory.

KLJN.6. In the wordless prologue, silent-cinema acting conventions satirize the idea of woman as object of worship.

be seduced (by Wyn) or casually dated (by Mark), but either way she is still likely to be taken for granted. Wyn counts on Kitty to wait around indefinitely. Mark, once Kitty agrees to marry him, assumes she'll help in his doctoring. Kitty makes the best choice she can, but the film's overall plot design suggests that some degree of unhappiness is the price of being a 1940s woman.

The pantomime prologue is cleverly knitted to the inner tale through the snow globe. As it opens each flashback, the snow veils the scene, and the globe's shape forms an iris around the action before opening out (fig. KJLN.7). This visual device, familiar from silent films, combines with the prologue's intertitles and wordless performances to invoke both another period and another mode of filmmaking. Reference to silent movies is a characteristic maneuver of 1940s Hollywood, and here it serves, like the flamboyant device of Mirror Kitty, to lighten what could have been a somber melodrama.

WOMAN, WANTING IT ALL

Kitty Foyle was released in December 1940, and over the following months the flashback film became an emerging trend in A pictures. In September 1941, the same month *Citizen Kane* went into wide release, came *Lydia*, an unusual independent production. Its story and direction were by the major French director Julien

KLJN.7. The snow globe transitions evoke the image-fringed iris of old movies.

Duvivier, and the peerless Ben Hecht composed the screenplay. Coming fairly early in the trend, *Lydia* is one of the most formally and emotionally adventurous flashback pictures of the 1940s. Here the flashbacks present a melodrama more operatic and melancholy than what we find in *Kitty*, and the handling of emerging schemas is even freer.

Lydia Macmillan is a Boston dowager who has devoted herself to funding an orphanage. One evening she reunites with three old suitors: Michael the doctor, Bob the nightclub owner, and Frank, a blind concert pianist. A fourth beau, the seafaring Richard, has been invited to their meeting, but he's late. On a terrace high above the city, Lydia and the three men discuss their lives from 1897 to the present. Each man has loved her, but she has refused them all. Across nine flashbacks, we learn why.

The film's early flashbacks are initiated by Michael, who took Lydia to her first ball. She is an impulsive, willful girl, and after her first waltz she breathlessly decides that the football player Bob is the love of her life. Without telling her grandmother, who serves as her guardian, she runs off with Bob. The tardiness of a judge and Bob's drunken advances prevent their marriage, and she flees. Michael continues to court Lydia, and when he goes off to the Spanish-American War she promises to wait for him. A chance meeting with a blind boy impels her to start a school for blind children, and as it flourishes she becomes steadier and more mature. She hires Frank to teach music at the school, and he inevitably falls in love with her. When Michael returns from the war, both he and Frank are cast aside when Lydia becomes

captivated by the rough, ardent Richard—again, during a delirious waltz.

At this point in the evening, the three men stop reminiscing. They don't understand why Lydia refused them all, and they're puzzled by Richard, who has slipped in and out of their pasts like a ghost. Lydia, now admittedly "old and crusty," snaps, "You never knew me at all." Only Richard knew the real Lydia. That Lydia was born through his love.

Her recounted flashbacks take over, with her voice-over commentary exposing her feelings and occasionally blaming herself for them. Lydia sails off with Richard to a cottage in the family village Macmillansport. For a month they live in passionate abandon. Then one morning Richard leaves, explaining by letter that he has an attachment to another woman. He will break free, but it will take time. He urges Lydia to wait. She does. He never returns.

Back in Boston after Frank's triumphant premiere of a concerto he has dedicated to her, Lydia receives one last letter from Richard. She abandons Michael and Frank to meet him. Again he fails to turn up. Michael once more presses her to marry him, and she reluctantly accepts. But the death of her grandmother, followed by a lonely visit to the enchanted cottage, convinces her she can't accept humdrum love. "If I can't have all there is, I don't want less." She resigns herself to a life alone.

Now, courtesy of censorship, comes one of the most brutal denouements in 1940s cinema. Richard finally arrives at the gathering of the old friends. The film was planned to conclude with his reunion with Lydia, but the Breen Office objected that she had not suffered enough, given all the spectacular extramarital sex she enjoyed.[3] In the release version, Richard uncertainly comes forward and recognizes no one. The man who promised "Till I die, I'll want you every minute" stares vacantly at Lydia. He has forgotten her. Producer Alexander Korda declared that the Code-approved ending was better than the original, and we're likely to agree.[4]

A woman clinging to romantic illusions formed the center of Duvivier's prize-winning *Un carnet de bal* (1937). The recently widowed Christine comes upon her dance card from years gone by and decides to visit each of the men who flirted with her. One has become a priest, another a doctor, another a hairdresser.

What's striking is that the film, despite extensive voice-over, doesn't employ flashbacks, consisting instead of long conversations between Christine and the men. *Lydia* then seems a natural step in treating the yearning to recover a lost moment: instead of a present-time telling of the past, we get a full-fledged dramatization. Just as Christine devotes herself to the orphaned son of the admirer she truly loved, Lydia sets up a children's home. Yet Lydia seems more in the grip of heedless passion. After finding that Richard no longer remembers her, she insists in voice-over, "I'll love him always, just as tonight."

As in *Un carnet de bal*, episodes are devoted to each man's relation to the heroine, but *Lydia*'s screenplay weaves Richard throughout several flashbacks. By chance he sees her run out on Bob; he meets her and Michael at a cabaret and stands alongside Michael at the rail of their departing ship; and he catches up with her and Michael during a frantic sleigh ride. He brings into Lydia's life a heedless Byronic dash that can't be matched by Michael the sober scientist, Bob the bluff man of ordinary appetites, or the sensitive but introspective Frank.

During their idyll, while the wind tears at their cottage, Richard reads aloud to Lydia from Thomas Moore's 1817 romance *Lalla Rookh*. The book, a prime document of British Romanticism, tells of a princess whose heart is won by a poet; he turns out to be the prince she's pledged to marry. The passage celebrates her as his greatest delight in the world. Both prince and poet, Richard incarnates the otherworldly longing Lydia has harbored all her life. Significantly, *Lalla Rookh* is a tale with four embedded stories about thwarted or reunited lovers.[5]

If Lydia is to turn into the bitter old woman of 1941, if her romanticism is to be deflated, then it needs to be presented in all its power. That power is registered as synesthesia, the transposition of one sense mode into another, and it becomes a motif in the drama. Lydia founds her children's home when she realizes that blind Johnny has never seen red or blue. She tries to explain that red is like the blare of trumpets. Frank, the blind pianist who claims to imitate colors on the keyboard, imagines Lydia as a blue-eyed blonde.

Motifs of color mingle with those of music, and above all the

KLJN.8. *Lydia* (1941): Frank's concerto evokes both the sea and lovers' passion.

sea, an elemental symbol of Romantic art. Grandmother Macmillan's sense of the sea is pragmatic and worldly. She claims her ailments come from all the seawater she's swallowed. When Lydia gets engaged to Michael, the old lady pronounces him a fit captain to guide the family. But Lydia understands the sea differently. It is an elemental counterpart to her emotional and sexual energy. That sea is in Frank's playing, which summons up currents and tempests. Above all, the sea is Richard's home. The orgasmic sequence of the couple's stormy arrival at the cottage, with waves pounding their sailboat, dramatizes their passionate unity. Listening to Frank's concerto after Richard has abandoned her, all Lydia can imagine is the oceanic feeling that locks her in Richard's furious embrace (fig. KLJN.8).

In the course of this emotionally saturated tale, Duvivier freely reworks the schemas of flashback narrative. Instead of dissolves linking present and past, he supplies abrupt cuts, accompanied by snatches of slightly discordant music. The conventions of voice-over get treated with equal freshness: the men's present-time voices merely lead into the episodes, but Lydia accompanies her flashbacks with desperate, almost incessant explanation and commentary. Thanks to the achievements of sound cutting in the late 1930s, the sound track can snap instantly between dialogue in the past and old Lydia's bitter comments in the present, miked slightly closer, as if she were watching the scene along with us.

LYDIA TO RICHARD: I'm so idiotically happy I can't think.
LYDIA IN THE PRESENT: Oh, that tittering, giggling little fool.

LYDIA TO RICHARD: This must be different from what life usually is, don't you think?

. . .

RICHARD TO LYDIA: I've read books in a bunk with the lights out.

LYDIA IN THE PRESENT: Oh, that stupid, stupid girl.

RICHARD TO LYDIA, READING: Oh the delight now in this very hour. . . .

The interjections puncture Lydia's dream of love with the voice of disenchanted age. The musical score similarly turns on a dime, slipping sudden bits of melody into pauses in the conversation between Lydia and Grandmother.[6] The old lady's lines suggest that Richard will turn out to be "a scoundrel and a dog," while bursts of tunes from the dazzling ball express Lydia's undying love. Soon enough Grandmother will be proved right.

Lydia's voice seems to take charge of the narrative when she recounts how she "sinned" with Richard. But is she a reliable narrator? The screenplay and Duvivier's direction raise a few doubts. At the beginning of the evening with her old beaus, she recalls her first ball as a splendid affair, with a full orchestra playing in a vast mirrored space. She and Michael enter in dreamy slow motion. (This is a common mark of subjectivity in today's flashbacks but was rare at the time; it indicates Duvivier's affiliation with the silent avant-garde.) She asks if Michael recalls the hundreds of musicians and squadrons of bowing Prince Charmings. "I never forgot that ball." Cut back to the terrace, with Michael saying: "It was actually . . ." Cut to their arrival replayed in normal motion, as a disappointed Lydia stares at a drab ballroom with only a few musicians. As if to mock her, the sound track replays her earlier voice-over describing the space, the performers, and the rest. Her memory has inflated an ordinary social dance into the apotheosis of sophistication.[7]

Is her idyll with Richard exaggerated too? The cottage is a strange building, supported by voluptuous wooden women that served as ships' figureheads (fig. KLJN.9). In returning to the Macmillans' hometown, Lydia revisits the family past so often invoked by her grandmother. The old woman's praise of the manly

KLJN.9. The female figureheads turn the lovers' remote cottage into a version of a ship at sea.

men of her day finds an echo in Richard. Richard is the Macmillan lineage brought back to life.

Or perhaps not completely. Richard is often described as a ghost; he has an uncanny way of turning up, or of simply vanishing from a scene. Frank says, "You have been in love with a phantom." At the finale, the phantom returns and claims never to have known the woman who has loved him for forty years. I'm not suggesting that Lydia's month with Richard was a dream or hallucination, but the film plays with the possibility that her excitable imagination has inflated a casual affair.

The staid men in Lydia's life wonder why she refused them. For us the question is what turns the exuberant girl of the first flashback into the tart old woman we see. The answers lie partly in her simply growing up and using her money for a good cause. But she doesn't settle into maturity; the rebellious girl who wanted to wear her gown off her shoulders never surrenders. It takes Richard to reveal the real Lydia. At the end, after a puzzled Richard has denied knowing her, Lydia tells Michael she's like all women, never to be captured in a single man's imagination.

> None of you loved me really. Bob loved a little idiot. Frank loved a girl with blue eyes and golden hair. You, my dear, you loved an angel. Richard, Richard loved only Richard. . . . There was no real Lydia, Michael. There were dozens of them.

In its closing moments, *Lydia* lays claim to the "prismatic" flashback method that Herman Mankiewicz had hoped to install in *Citizen Kane*.

But, as with Charles Foster Kane, we see not so much facets of a single character as phases of character change. Surely the flashbacks sharpen our appreciation of the vicissitudes of a person's life. Yet this plotting doesn't suggest a fully complex personality—fluctuating, unpredictable, torn by deep uncertainties. What kicks in are the familiar tactics of Hollywood characterization. The primacy effect reliably establishes underlying traits: Lydia remains the willful romantic she was at the start. Single causes trigger the events that cascade in linear fashion. She notices a blind boy, then founds a school. She kisses Richard, and they immediately run off. Hindsight bias presents character change as predestined. And women face a constrained set of narrative options: dull respectability or forbidden love. Kitty Foyle abandons heady passion for comfortable affection, while Lydia accepts solitude and lives with a memory, perhaps exaggerated, of transcendent love.

WOMAN'S MASKS: CALCULATING

The Hollywood storytelling aesthetic, consolidated for the sound cinema in the 1930s, dedicated to reliable first impressions and stable character traits, is not easy to dislodge. Does *The Affairs of Susan* (1945) dislodge it? So it might seem. The film provides a romantic-comedy version of Lydia's suggestion that a woman is always protean, never fully adequate to men's perceptions of her.

In the frame story, the government bureaucrat Richard Aiken is about to marry the stage star Susan Darell. But he gets nervous when he sees her collection of photos, each one a portrait of a different man in her life. He gets even more nervous at her party that night. Each of three men describes a different Susan. To Mike, the lumber tycoon from the West, she is a frivolous socialite who loves dancing. The intellectual Bill tells Richard she's austere and concerned only with ideas. And Roger, her producer and former husband, says that Susan loves to fight and is completely unpredictable.

Richard is confused. He assembles the men for a bachelor party, and in three long flashbacks they recount their affairs with her.

In Roger's account, Susan is a simple country girl who doesn't

understand why the postman wants to kiss her. Roger taps that purity and idealism by casting her as Joan of Arc. The role makes her a star, but her naïveté becomes a problem. Her frank comments alienate Roger's theatrical associates, who survive on flattery and lies. She costs him so many potential patrons that he divorces her. The Susan Roger knows is too simple to survive in show business.

Good-hearted Mike has another version. His Susan is bubbling and flirtatious, and she coaxes Mike into backing Roger's new show. Roger fumes. What ensues is the familiar triangle of *The Awful Truth* (1937) and similar romantic comedies, with the divorced couple expressing their love through constant quarreling while the straight man looks on uncomprehending. Through misunderstandings involving a gift brooch, Mike catches Susan in Roger's apartment and stalks out, but not before clobbering his rival.

To simple Susan and wily Susan, Bill adds deep Susan. An arrogant egghead, Bill tells of meeting her when she's reading on a park bench. He tries to seduce her by becoming her guru. He seems to be succeeding, as we see when Susan summons Mike and Roger to her apartment. In schoolteacher's garb and horn-rimmed glasses, she all but orders them to adapt for the stage Bill's new best seller, a pretentious jeremiad on the state of the world. But her affair with Bill ends when she realizes that, good contrarian that he is, he doesn't believe in marriage.

Back in the present, Richard thanks the men for their accounts. He announces that he and Susan are about to fly out to Pasadena to be married under the eye of his mother (a sure sign that Richard will not get the girl). Roger, Mike, and Bill rush to her apartment, and they all propose to her. She turns down all of them except Roger, who has apologized contritely for divorcing her: "I didn't work hard enough at being married."

Three Susans? Not really. As in *Lydia*, the heroine retains the traits we see in her first flashback, when Roger meets the simple country girl in plaid shirt and blue jeans. What we are seeing aren't the facets of a complex character but the social masks she has learned to assume.[8] Susan learns from her marriage to Roger that she must play different roles. She comes back from Reno as

glamorous man bait and entices Mike through pure calculation. Similarly, her turn to intellectual pursuits is another way to secure a stage show for Roger, but mostly a ploy to make him jealous of Bill.

It's important, therefore, that Susan is a professional actress; a shopgirl or a dance-hall girl might not have carried her ruses off so well. At one point she can exploit metaknowledge. While she's dancing with Roger, he accuses her of pretending to be frivolous in order to seduce Mike, but she replies, "Maybe I was pretending when I was that simple little country girl. Did you ever think of that?" Early on she seems to be supremely malleable, a Galatea for Roger's Pygmalion. The climax reveals that this actress has learned the game better than the men.

By then it's clear that Susan has loved Roger all along. Her role-playing, including her apparently imminent marriage to Richard, is a scheme to bring Roger back. At the finale, when Roger confronts her in her bedroom, he learns that she counted on his reformation. The suitcase she has packed, supposedly for her honeymoon with Richard, contains her plaid shirt and blue jeans.

If this is such a conventional romantic comedy, what does the flashback structure add? For one thing, it sharpens the sense of Susan's multiple roles by segregating them, one role per flashback. For another, the structure allots some space to characterizing the men, so that the film can puncture male vanity in familiar romantic comedy fashion. The opening frame leaves a comically enticing breadcrumb trail as well. Confined closely to Richard's range of knowledge, we meet his three rivals in framed photograph that come to life as each man warns that Susan will deceive him. Under questioning Susan confesses she was married before, perhaps twice: as far as Bill is concerned, she says, "I did . . . and I didn't." We'll learn what that equivocation means. Mike tells of Susan's love of dancing; later we'll learn that she induced him to go beyond the stiff waltz he favored.

Most subtly, the flashback design conceals Susan's scheme. In *The Awful Truth*, the narration shifts between the divorced couple, so that we're aware of each partner's efforts to make the other jealous. But we're never privy to Susan's machinations. We must

infer them from her successes (bamboozling Mike) and mistakes (thinking Roger sent her a brooch that Mike had bought for her). Observing her solely from the men's side, we can grasp the totality of her scheme only at the very end, when in another echo of her first days with Roger, she regrets not kissing the postman.

The film's structure also exploits the customary leakiness of a cinematic flashback. Kitty Foyle's and Lydia Macmillan's flashbacks are restricted almost wholly to what the character could have seen, heard, or known about. In fact, part of their power derives from our not knowing what their men are up to offscreen. But as we've seen, cinema isn't confined to single perspectives to the degree that literary narration is. Accordingly, in *The Affairs of Susan*, Roger's initial flashback is tightly confined to what he knows, but both Mike's and Bill's go beyond their ken. These deviations serve mainly to develop the continuing battle between Susan and Roger. Only we witness their quarrels and truces, culminating in their eventual reunion.

The result is something we'll observe in other narrative designs. In the story world, Roger, Mike, and Bill are more or less equal competitors for Susan's heart. But the plot structure and the narration favor Roger. His flashback is the first and the longest; we're sometimes attached to him in scenes during the other men's flashbacks; and he's played by the biggest male star in the picture, George Brent. (Sixth-billed Richard Abel, who plays the fiancé Richard, is doomed from the credits onward.) Roger is first among equals, a principle we'll encounter in multiple-protagonist plots as well.

The plot shrewdly varies the order of the men's ranking, always to Roger's advantage. Lydia's parlor photos show Roger, then Bill, then Mike, so the primacy effect favors Roger. When their images speak, it's in the reverse of that order, so that Roger gets to deliver the topper "Sucker!" In the party, we first see Mike, then Bill, and finally Roger, who makes a big entrance. The flashbacks favor Roger, who supplies the exposition; Bill doesn't even make an appearance in the other men's episodes. At the apartment, Richard, Mike, and Bill pile in to propose. Roger is set apart again, revealed waiting in her bedroom, as she knew he would be.

The Affairs of Susan transposes the promise of a prismatic flashback into a comic key. If it lacks both the tough-tender atmosphere of *Kitty Foyle* and the tempestuous energy of *Lydia*, it shows how adaptable the device was. *Kitty* gives us recalled chunks of the past in a crisis-driven frame, and *Lydia* gives us shared memories recounted in tranquillity. Both these patterns became common in the 1940s. So too did *Susan*'s template, the use of symmetrical flashbacks that may converge on a single character or diverge, as when *Letter to Three Wives* (1948) presents parallel protagonists.

WOMAN'S MASKS: COMPULSIVE

Our sampling of the shapes of the gynocentric flashback can usefully wrap up by considering one of the most flagrantly engineered of them all. Nancy is ten, and her mother works as a servant for a wealthy family. The daughter of the house, Karen, is Nancy's best friend. Karen gets a diamond locket for her birthday, but she gives it to Nancy. Karen's mother, distressed, takes it back from the girl. Later the locket goes missing, and Karen's mother forces Nancy to confess that she stole it. Although the locket simply went astray by accident, Nancy and her mother are dismissed from the household.

This childhood trauma triggers the story action of *The Locket* (1946). It might serve as the beginning of a plot about a girl who becomes a pert and lively lady who is also a liar, thief, and killer. The film would almost certainly have to be told from her viewpoint, and it would be a study of a femme fatale in extremis. But *The Locket* doesn't attach us to Nancy's perspective, and it isn't told chronologically.

Given those choices, it might have been rendered as the memory of her psychiatrist, as is Arch Oboler's *Bewitched* (1945), a study of a murderous schizophrenic. But *The Locket* goes further—two steps further, in fact. Nancy's childhood episode is embedded in a flashback, which is in turn embedded in another flashback. The stories are nested like Russian dolls. The result is that the earliest story event, the crisis of Karen's missing locket, is the ultimate secret, the source of what teases us in other lay-

ers. Like *Passage to Marseille* (1945), *The Locket* (1946) turns on a puzzle of character: Is the beautiful and charming Nancy exactly as she seems? We find out when we witness a childhood trauma located in the center of the plot's geometry.

We start on the wedding day of John Willis. While Nancy, his dazzling bride-to-be, beguiles the guests, John is called to his study to meet Dr. Blair, a psychiatrist. Dr. Blair has come to warn John: Nancy is "hopelessly twisted." He explains that he and Nancy were once married. In flashback we see a young artist, Norman Clyde, visiting Blair's office. Norman tells him that Nancy could be charged with murder, and that she must act to save the life of a man about to be executed.

Norman's explanation opens his own flashback showing Nancy's romance with him. She calls the attention of her boss, Mr. Bonner, to Norman's paintings, but after the couple attend a party at the Bonner home, Norman finds that Nancy has stolen a guest's bracelet. She explains her childhood trauma, and that's when we get the innermost flashback.

The plot now backs its way out of that. When Nancy finishes explaining, we return to Norman's studio. He suggests to her that stealing the locket was revenge on Karen's mother. Nancy swears she'll never steal again, and Norman anonymously mails the bracelet back to its owner. Later, at another party at the Bonners', Norman hears a gunshot. He finds Nancy running down the corridor while a maid discovers Bonner's body. Later Nancy denies killing her boss, and Norman agrees to conceal what he saw. But he's tormented because Bonner's valet is now the suspect. Claiming Norman is too suspicious of her, Nancy breaks off their affair.

Norman's flashback now ended, he begs Dr. Blair to induce Nancy to confess and save the valet, who's to be executed tonight. Nancy, all innocence, denies killing Bonner. The next day, with the valet now executed, Norman flings himself through Blair's office window and falls to his death. Shaken, Dr. Blair returns to England, where he and Nancy take up the war effort. When a bomb is dropped on their street, Blair searches the rubble of the house and finds jewels that have gone missing from the collection of an acquaintance. Blair's discovery triggers his nervous breakdown, and Nancy leaves England.

We are back in the outermost frame, John's wedding. He remains skeptical of Blair's story. Nancy smilingly admits knowing Blair. But she says he was only her psychoanalyst and points out that he was recently released from an asylum. Having renewed John's trust, she goes to meet his mother, who is revealed to be the mother of Karen, John's sister and Nancy's playmate of long ago.

We now understand that Nancy is vengefully marrying into the family that had cast her out as a child. Karen has died years before. Now her mother fastens Karen's locket around Nancy's neck. Trying to brazen out the ceremony, Nancy is assailed by memories of her childhood and her crimes—a fourth, fragmentary flashback passage summing up the others. She becomes dizzy, screams, and faints. As she's numbly taken to a sanatorium, John decides to go with her, adhering to Blair's last bit of advice: "Lockets are only symbols. It's love she needed–and love she needs now." Maybe she isn't as hopelessly twisted as he had initially said, or as the plot itself seems to be.

Beyond Glory saved its revelation of trauma for the climax, but *The Locket* doesn't do that. Nor does the crucial scene come near the center of the running time, as the plot's Chinese-boxes geometry might suggest. The childhood scene arrives at the pivotal twenty-five-minute mark, after Nancy confesses to Norman that she stole the bracelet at the Bonners' party. Once the mystery of her behavior is solved, the plot emphasizes the aftershocks of Nancy's childhood. We no longer have a probe into personality but a scenario promoting suspense. As the evidence piles up against her in each episode, the question becomes: How will she outwit her man this time?

This maneuver is especially salient in the film's last third, when Blair suspects that Nancy has stolen jewelry from Lord Wyndham's collection. He tries to peek into her purse, but when she finally shakes out its contents, the missing locket isn't there. He is relieved, though his suspicions continue to prey on his mind. We have to wait too, but when Blair finds the necklace in the apartment wreckage, we're hardly surprised.

Throughout the men's stories, the film drops a few hints that Nancy isn't what she seems. At one point the camera lingers on her after Blair has left her in their London apartment. As she

closes the blackout curtains, she crouches and glances sidewise in the classic posture of guilt (fig. KLJN.10). Earlier, when she starts to tell Norman about Mrs. Willis's abuse of her, she turns from him and glances at the camera, as if asking us to believe her (fig. KLJN.11).

Just as provocative is the linking of Nancy with Cassandra, the suffering madwoman of Greek mythology who was ignored by those she tried to warn. Cassandra had the gift of prophecy, but that quality seems denied to Nancy. The prophetess we meet in the movie is a horoscope reader at the wedding, and her predictions are banal and contradictory. More telling is that the film's Cassandra is seen in Norman's painting, and her eyes are filmed over, blank and presumably blind. This image is counterposed to the portrait Norman later paints of Bonner's wife (figs. KLJN.12 and KLJN.13).

Mrs. Bonner is confined to a wheelchair, but on the canvas she is presented as majestically erect and possessed of a penetrating glance. The blind Cassandra seems scarily oblivious to her madness, while this painted mother figure seems all-seeing. It's no great reach to consider her a variant of Karen's mother, who tormented the young Nancy and who comes back at the end as another, less serene incarnation of Norman's second painting (fig. KLJN.14).

In sum, the prophetic powers of the heroine's mythological counterpart are claimed by the film's overall narration. It makes sure that details planted in the childhood episode (the locket, the painting, a music-playing cigarette box, the mean mother) come back with relentless force at the end. In *The Locket*, the breadcrumb trail is laid in the core flashback rather than in the framing situations leading up to it.

But we shouldn't forget that the Cassandra of myth was repeatedly raped. If she's mad, men helped make her that way. The film is a study as much in male neurosis as in female frailties. Behind the swagger and insults, the artist Norman is insecure, and he ends his life spectacularly. Earlier he had told Nancy, "If I had to relive these past few weeks, I'd kill myself." As for Dr. Blair, on the strength of a single encounter he smugly diagnoses Norman as "a paranoiac with guilt fantasies." Yet he conveniently

KLJN.10. *The Locket* (1946): Nancy furtively closes the curtains against the London Blitz. Is she looking off toward the hiding place of Lord Wyndham's locket?

KLJN.11. Nancy starts to confess her trauma to Norman, but her glance brings us into the situation as well.

KLJN.12. Cassandra in upswept curls and a classical landscape, with Nancy.

KLJN.13. Mrs. Bonner strides across a modern landscape with matriarchal authority.

KLJN.14. Nancy's severe mother-in-law to be.

forgets the stolen bracelet during the English episode. He seizes on his wife's childhood loss of the locket, but he ignores the consequences it had in adulthood. After a few years with Nancy and the Blitz, he's the one who ends up in an asylum.

Unlike the stalwart heroes of *Passage to Marseille*, Nancy's men trace no steady character arc. In *The Locket*, the men's failure to understand Nancy, let alone heal her, is made explicit when she tells Blair about a film she's just seen. "I'm all goose pimples." "A melodrama?" he asks, invoking a term often applied to crime films and thrillers.

NANCY: Yes, it was ghastly. You ought to see it, Harry. It's about a schizophrenic who kills his wife and doesn't know it.

BLAIR, LAUGHING: I'm afraid that wouldn't be much of a treat for me.

NANCY: That's where you're wrong. You'd never guess how it turns out. Now it may not be sound psychologically, but the wife's father is the–

BLAIR: Darling, do you mind? You can tell me later.

Nancy's father, she told Norman, was a painter like him, but he failed and is already dead when we see her as a child. In the popularized Freudianism of the 1940s, perhaps Nancy lacks the firm guidance of a strong male; certainly her kind but ineffectual mother isn't much help to her. But then neither are these supposedly grown-up men—no more than most of the males populating *Kitty Foyle*, *Lydia*, and *The Affairs of Susan*.

During Nancy's hallucinatory march to the altar, music and dialogue and visual moments from earlier in the film run riot in her mind (fig. KLJN.15). This suits the inward bent of *The Locket* as a whole, which contains almost no outdoor scenes. We might be tempted to attribute this interiority to the old standbys, wartime trauma and postwar malaise. The subjective sequences could be put down to the resurgence of Expressionist style, purportedly under the influence of German directors and technicians who fled to Hollywood. But as we've seen, we needn't invoke such remote causes. *The Locket*, like dozens of other flashback films of its era, offers its own blend of traditional and

KLJN.15. During her walk to the altar, in the carpet Nancy sees the terrifying mother of her childhood.

emerging schemas. The variety we find at work in any film has its most concrete causes in filmmakers' desire to offer something at once fresh and familiar.

The reverse-engineering principles I'm examining here don't give me elbow room to talk about other enticing aspects of these four movies. At the level of performance and star acting, for instance, we could study Ginger Rogers's deployment of mouth-twisting in her shopgirl mode. Merle Oberon, famous for playing the willful Cathy of *Wuthering Heights*, gives Lydia a mix of stubbornness and childish enthusiasm. She becomes a flibbertigibbet when she sees Richard off, as if it's the farewell scene she's always dreamed of enacting. (One has to wonder if Korda made the film as a gift to his wife, Oberon, as a smitten Selznick paid tribute to Jennifer Jones.) In *The Affairs of Susan*, Joan Fontaine's performance has to maintain both the mask and the real Susan behind it. Her star image of a timid, unspoiled woman, forged in *Rebecca* (1940), serves her well throughout, edging her masquerade of sophistication with awkward moments. And Laraine Day, barely a featured player, is ideal for making Nancy pure facade, the perky girl next door who denies all the forces seething inside her.

For our purposes, the films illustrate how the dynamics of Hollywood storytelling absorb cultural commonplaces. Like amnesia, the theme of woman's mystery serves as material for formal processing, and the flashback was a major new processing site of the 1940s.

CHAPTER 3

Plots: The Menu

The difference between a screenplay and real life is that a screenplay has to make sense.

Attributed to Joseph L. Mankiewicz

FLASHBACK CONSTRUCTION IS THE MOST VISIBLE WAY THAT Hollywood dramaturgy of the 1940s broke a story's continuity. In recalling the "well-made novel" of the 1910s and 1920s and in picking up the moderately modernist techniques of popular fiction, filmmakers' juggling with chronology renewed Hollywood storytelling strategies.

From this perspective, straight linear storytelling can look a bit old hat. Yet we know the rich possibilities available to sheer chronology in Dickens and Eliot, to say nothing of Shakespeare and Chekhov. True, shifting scenes out of order could make characterization more complex and pay dividends in curiosity, suspense, and surprise. But 1-2-3 construction offers the advantage of clarity and cumulative force. Many of the most engaging films of the era, from *Gone with the Wind* and *Rebecca* to *The Best Years of Our Lives*, played no games with story order. And linearity didn't run the risk of confusing audiences to the degree that we find in flashback films like *Passage to Marseille* and *Beyond Victory*. Flashbacks teased, but chronology reassured.

The Hollywood tradition rested firmly on principles of continuity—within scenes, between scenes, and across the entire film. Indeed, filmmakers had enshrined "continuity" as a god-word. It named an early version of a script (writers prepared a "continuity"), and it marked what was to be kept consistent during production. The "script girl" kept track of props, actors' gestures, and other items that would maintain continuity across shots—a quality maintained by the editors who matched footage for maximum flow.[1]

Critics embraced the idea as well. Gilbert Seldes praised silent film as pure movement, a dynamic thrust that no other art possessed. After talkies arrived, story flow mattered even more. Otis Ferguson noted that by the mid-1930s Hollywood had created a new narrative form: a "clear line of action," a dramatic thrust that was uniquely satisfying.[2] Ferguson praised "the rightness and immediacy of each fragment as it appears to you, makes its impression, leads you along with each incident of the story, and projects the imagination beyond into things to come."[3]

Screenwriters took pride in tight, ingenious plotting. Writers known as solid "constructionists" recognized the artisanal aspect of their task. Given an approximate running time of eighty to one hundred minutes, the screenwriter had to fill it out with a major plotline and a secondary one, along with progressions and reversals familiar from drama, the popular novel, and other films. Reporting that he liked the work, Fitzgerald compared it to "fitting together a very interesting picture puzzle."[4] The principles of dramatic continuity were the foundations on which even zigzag chronologies were built.

Writers were aware that linearity tempted them toward clichés. I. A. L. Diamond contributed a funny list of rote items that persist to our day. These include a redundant opening shot of a city (Big Ben with a superimposed title, "London"); a newspaper headline advancing a plot point; transitions showing a blooming tree followed by an autumnal one; endings in which lovers run toward each other or go off into the distance. "Dissolves which indicate a passage of time have, paradoxically enough, been little affected by the passage of time."[5] At worst these could serve as cinematic shorthand to push the story along. At best, film-

makers might find ways to extend or revise the basic continuity principles.

PICK YOUR PROTAGONIST

The plot is based, the screenplay manuals usually say, on conflict, but what arouses the conflict? Typically, a protagonist with a goal. The film's forward movement is created by efforts to achieve the goal and by obstacles that block its attainment. Yet the goal doesn't remain quite the same throughout the plot; typically the protagonist adjusts the goal in response to changing circumstances.

A good example is *Five Graves to Cairo* (1943). John Bramble, a British officer, is the sole survivor of a desert tank attack. His initial goal is to survive in the desert, and once he does, he must rejoin his unit. He takes refuge in a small bombed-out hotel. When General Rommel's forces enter town, Bramble conceives a new purpose: to kill Rommel. Accordingly Bramble assumes the identity of a waiter who was killed in a bombardment. Opposing him is Mouche, a French maid working in the hotel. Mouche hates the English because her brother was abandoned at Dunkirk. She is hoping she can persuade Rommel or his lieutenant to arrange her other brother's release from a concentration camp. At first it appears she will reveal Bramble's identity, but she sulkily goes along.

Bramble manages to steal a pistol, and he learns that Davos, the waiter he's impersonating, was actually a German agent. This gives Bramble ample opportunity to kill Rommel. But his plan is reformulated when British officers taken prisoner quietly order him to investigate Rommel's plans for the North African campaign. As Davos, Bramble is in a good position to learn the meaning of the code phrase "five graves to Cairo." So Bramble reformulates his goals: to keep his real identity secret, to keep Mouche from betraying him, and to discover Rommel's secret strategy.

Three things are worth noting here. First, characterization, in Aristotelian fashion, is fitted to plot action. Bramble, Mouche, Rommel, and the others are defined largely by what they contribute to the conflict. Their temperaments are revealed by the

circumstances and by the goals they pursue. Even when 1940s films purport to probe character, as in *Lydia* or *The Locket*, that effort springs from an urge to understand a string of actions. What caused Lydia to reject all her suitors? What made Nancy a perky kleptomaniac? Almost invariably, characterization is locked within an explicit pattern of cause and effect. We get to know the people through their responses to the pressure of a problematic situation. Although some Hollywood films traffic in character change, character revelation through a string of actions is far more common.

Second, the protagonist is unequivocally signaled as such. Hollywood films typically introduce the protagonist early, so Bramble is shown in the opening scene as his tank lurches across the desert. The ensuing action is largely organized around what he does. A more "literary" handling might tell the story from the standpoint of Farid, the put-upon manager of the hotel. Through his reflections on the action, Farid might be developed sufficiently to become the protagonist. But the film gives him a secondary role, that of helper. That Bramble is introduced through action rather than commentary illustrates the way Hollywood movies favor arresting pictorial movement at the start. Unlike a play, noted one screenwriter, movies sought to avoid verbal exposition and to launch themselves through "intense physical or emotional activity."[6] Here the viewer watches breathlessly as Bramble regains consciousness while tumbling around in a tank heaving aimlessly among the dunes.

Third, the action is organized in coherent midsize units. Screenwriters sometimes spoke of plotting in "acts" or "sequences," suggesting the broader architecture ruling the film. Historian Kristin Thompson has shown convincingly that the typical Hollywood feature of any era contains three or four large-scale parts, each running about twenty to thirty minutes.[7] These consist of a setup, a complicating action, a development section, and a climax, usually followed by an epilogue. In *Five Graves to Cairo*, the setup section runs about twenty-eight minutes, at which point Bramble comes face to face with Rommel and learns that Davos was a German spy. In the complicating action,

Bramble steals a pistol from the Italian general, but Mouche hides it so she can appeal to Rommel to save her brother. Although Rommel refuses, Schwegler offers to help in exchange for sex. Bramble finds the pistol and is about to kill Rommel when the British officers dissuade him and he accepts their mission of discovering Rommel's strategy.

The next two parts follow the standard structure. At the film's midpoint, Bramble's mission is clear, but the mystery of the five graves remains. Now comes a typical development section, based on background information about the action and further efforts to achieve character goals. At dinner with the captured British officers, Rommel genially tosses out clues to how he can maintain long supply lines as his forces push ahead. Bramble discovers that Rommel, anticipating a desert war, had visited archaeological sites in 1937 and buried supplies in them. Bramble's new task becomes to find those sites. Thanks to one of Rommel's clues, Bramble realizes they are marked on Rommel's map at each letter of the word *Egypt*. In the meantime, Mouche thinks she's approaching her goal when Schwegler shows her telegrams indicating her brother's release from the camp.

All this takes place under time pressure: Rommel has assigned Bramble-as-Davos to leave for Cairo that evening. Setting deadlines is one of the most characteristic features of classical plotting, and few Hollywood films are without one or more. A deadline ensures suspense in the film's final section, when all will be won or lost.

The final large-scale section, the climax, starts some twenty-five minutes from the end of *Five Graves*. Bramble sneaks into Rommel's office and discovers the locations of the supply dumps just as an Allied bombardment starts. In the cellar, a blast uncovers the body of Davos the waiter, and Bramble is forced to kill Schwegler. As Bramble flees for Cairo, Mouche is brought before Rommel. Realizing she has no hope of helping her brother, she stands up to the Nazis and covers Bramble's retreat. She is accused of impeding the German cause and faces punishment. After the Allies check Rommel's advance, Bramble returns when the British retake the town. In an epilogue—another characteris-

tic of Hollywood plot construction—he learns that Mouche was executed. As with most classical scripts, the epilogue, or "tag," confirms that both plotlines have been resolved.

This large-scale progression assures a broad continuity, but the rapid flow that critics like Ferguson celebrated yields moment-to-moment continuity as well. Take the first "act." Ten minutes into the film, Bramble collapses in the hotel, just as the Germans arrive. The manager Farid hides him behind the front counter. What might have been perfunctory exposition, with Schwegler and his men commandeering the hotel, becomes a long passage of suspense. Will the unconscious Bramble groan? Will the Germans look behind the desk? When the Germans shift the desk aside, will he be revealed? (No; Bramble has revived and crawled inside the counter, to be moved along with it.) All this business consumes merely another ten minutes. Once Bramble decides to impersonate Davos, we learn that Mouche hates the British, and immediately Bramble is brought to Rommel, who is already dictating his battle plans. Now we learn that Davos was a spy, and Bramble is given his first clue: a toast to the Five Graves. His new goal is set. These last twists in the action take only eight minutes.

The swift flow gets even more densely packed with supplementary character bits, delays, and motifs. The Italian general accompanying the Germans is treated as a comic villain, good for some recurring jokes on bombast and cowardice, but his chief function is to provide Bramble with a pistol. Visual and verbal motifs stitch the film together, as when Davos's corpse is identified by his clubfoot, which Bramble has been imitating. A close-up of Bramble's dog tags pays off when, playing the waiter and serving the British prisoners, he drapes them over a liquor bottle to signal his identity. (Suspense follows when the Italian general spots them and decides to sample this new drink "Bramble," which "tastes like whiskey.") When Mouche pleads for her brother's life, Rommel snappishly orders her to take "two steps back." At the climax, when she challenges him, she mockingly orders him to do the same. As in the well-made play, late reversals and revelations are foreshadowed early on.

Bramble's affection for Mouche and his appreciation of her

sacrifice are expressed through a prop. Mouche has one pretty dress, but she yearns for a matching parasol she saw in a shop. In the epilogue, returning to the town, Bramble brings her a parasol. Too late; he can only open it on her grave. That grave itself, one of dozens stretching along the town road, encapsulates the master motif of the film. The ancient graves that Rommel had emptied to fill with supplies are paralleled by the present-day graves he leaves behind in his advance.

DOUBLE PLOTS, OR FEET VERSUS FACE

Five Graves to Cairo is typical of Hollywood plotting in offering us two principal lines of action.[8] Mouche's misguided efforts to save her brother form a secondary story line, interweaving with and sometimes blocking Bramble's efforts. Surprisingly, no love affair develops between the two of them. More commonly, the double plot intertwines one goal-defined story line with another involving romance.

The romantic plotline is often primary. "The love story," James M. Cain wrote, "*is* the story. It is the coal in the bunkers from which everything else, the emotion, the comedy, the illusion of speed, is generated."[9] The double-plot pattern is particularly evident when we have not one protagonist, as with Bramble, but two—most often a romantic couple. Love and work very often supply the couple with goals, obstacles, and deadlines.

As a model of the paired-protagonist film, consider *Cover Girl* (1944). Rusty Parker sings and dances in Danny McGuire's Brooklyn nightclub. Though she and Danny are in love, her career is moving too slowly to suit her. Against Danny's advice she auditions as a magazine model and is picked as *Vanity*'s new cover girl. She becomes so famous that a Broadway producer wants to star her in a show. *Vanity*'s publisher John Coudair maneuvers the naive Rusty away from Danny and toward marriage to the producer Wheaton. Danny decides to let her live as she likes, but their pal Genius intervenes at the last moment. Rusty flees her wedding to reunite with Danny in Brooklyn.

The classical four-part structure, suitably filled out by musical numbers, rules *Cover Girl*'s plot, but just as important is the mul-

tiplication of goals and the splitting of the protagonist function. The couple share a common goal, fulfillment in love and success in show business. But their relationship is strained by Rusty's ambition and Danny's stubbornness. Their quarrels escalate to the point that they separate, and the plot alternates their activities: Rusty in the glamorous world, Danny brooding in his club or with Genius at Joe's Diner. During their extended evening apart, when Wheaton has "kidnapped" Rusty, she is shown dancing joyously on the vast stage he offers her. The next scene finds Danny waiting hopelessly for her in the diner before drifting outside to dance alone—or rather, with his *doppelgänger*, a window reflection that joins him on the sidewalk. In a characteristic 1940s sequence, his voice-over argument with himself leads to a dueling pas de deux. During that long night, each of the protagonists gets a privileged moment, one of happiness and the other of dejection.

The couple's career goals are organized around the duality of face versus feet. Danny is convinced Rusty's future lies in dancing because of the "diamonds in her toes." But she senses that she can achieve fame faster by becoming a model. The duality reaches a threatening synthesis in Wheaton's offer of a Broadway show. There she can dazzle with her dancing during a number devoted to the beauty of magazine cover girls. Danny seems beaten on his own terms: Rusty's future is in both her face *and* her feet.

What resolves the conflict is another, almost magical motif. Rusty, Danny, and Genius customarily visit Joe's Diner every Friday hoping to find a pearl in their orders of oysters. On the night of Rusty's wedding (the deadline), Danny actually does find a pearl. He bitterly casts it aside, but Genius takes it to the publisher Coudair, who passes it to Rusty at her wedding. It's partly the pearl that makes her run back to Danny.

The discovery of the pearl might seem to flout the principle of tight cause and effect: Isn't it just too flagrant a coincidence? It does smack of the fairy tale, but it's justified in that the characters have looked for a pearl before. By the logic of comic foreshadowing, the pearl search would not have been planted in the first place if something weren't to come of it. Moreover, the pearl is linked to Rusty's fate by lines of dialogue from Coudair and Wheaton, who compare her to a pearl. The pearl, we might say, is so heavily

motivated that the formal symmetry of the discovery overrides any concerns about plausibility. The film floats other fairy tale motifs, such as a reference to magic carpets and a woman's portrait that lacks only a face—a compelling figure for a cover girl image. Add in the polarities of cover girl versus dancer and Brooklyn versus Broadway. These motifs reinforce the overall arc of the film driving Rusty away from Danny's little club.

Musical motifs thread through the film too. *Cover Girl* isn't quite as tightly constructed, moment by moment, as *Five Graves*, because the plot pauses for its musical numbers. Yet the numbers are often extended passages of characterization (Danny, Rusty, and Genius celebrating their friendship in "Make Way for Tomorrow") and displays of reconciliation ("Long Ago and Far Away"). Once these melodies have been given full display in the numbers, they can flit through the score at crucial moments, as when the love theme recurs at the moment Rusty decides not to marry Wheaton. The Hollywood cinema is massively formal, and its power stems in part from its concern to fit its characters, actions, and visual and auditory motifs into a whole that seems at once constantly surprising and retrospectively coherent.

Unity of causality and motif is aided by another classical plotting strategy: parallelism. One reason the publisher Coudair is enraptured by Rusty is that he once courted her grandmother, Maribelle. Through flashbacks, we see him infatuated with her stage performances and pursuing her as relentlessly as he will pursue Rusty. The final flashback, a very brief one during the wedding ceremony, shows Maribelle bolting from *her* wedding because of another charged prop: the piano that reminds her of her real love. The 1900 triangle of Coudair—Maribelle—piano player is matched by the current one of Wheaton—Rusty—Danny. Along with the pearl Genius brings to the ceremony, the memory of her grandmother's happy marriage impels Rusty to return to Danny.

Goals may be the armature of most Hollywood plots, but they can change, as we saw in *Five Graves to Cairo*. And sometimes the protagonist wants the wrong thing and is tempted to work against her best interests. In Rusty's case, she may think she wants to marry Wheaton—largely because she thinks Danny has aban-

doned her—but the finale aligns her dream of career success with what she needs, her longtime beau.

These plotting strategies are part of what commentators, then and since, dismiss as formulas. Yet that term doesn't do justice to their variety and fertility. Hollywood cinema, built on a rich array of narrative conventions, is as legitimate a model of narrative as the double plot of Elizabethan drama or the nineteenth century's well-made play.[10] It yields an open-ended set of schemas for ingenious artisans to exploit. Those artisans were not perfectly explicit about their craft principles; many of the conventions I've mentioned here have been reconstructed by scholars analyzing films from all periods.[11] These principles are indispensable starting points for understanding the storytelling options facing filmmakers during the 1940s.

HOW MANY HEROES?

A blizzard hits Manhattan and changes the lives of three women who share an apartment. Anne, a lonely switchboard operator, spends an evening with a stranded suburban commuter. Although he's married, she's tempted to have a quick affair. Anne's roommate Linda is an aspiring actress who's offered a big role, but this threatens her impending marriage to Jim, who wants her to give up the stage. The model Julie starts flirting with a rich man who frequents the couturier she works for. As the day goes on, the plot intercuts events in each woman's day. Ultimately Julie becomes the rich man's new mistress while Anne forgoes the one-night stand but winds up in the arms of Jim, who's broken off with the ambitious Linda after her successful debut.

This slick-magazine short story, "Night of the Blizzard," appeared in 1941 and was optioned by Fox, though never produced.[12] *Variety* recognized it as "a Grand Hotel idea."[13] What made it seem that way, I think, is that it typifies an alternative to a film focused on one or two protagonists: the multiple-protagonist plot.

Naturally, every plot of any complexity shows several characters converging. But when the purposes of one or two protagonists dominate the action, everyone who crosses that path is treated as

help or hindrance. After all, in *Five Graves to Cairo*, Mouche and Farid have somehow come together at the desert hotel, and in *Cover Girl* Genius has been a pal to Danny and Rusty. But these intersections are premises for the main action, not momentous in themselves. Most characters, regardless of their backstories, are subsidiary to the protagonist's arc of incident. Sometimes, though, we'll sense a different structure when the plot lets other characters compete for the role of protagonist.

There is, for instance, the rare parallel-protagonist plot. A straightforward case is *The Killers* (1946); there is one protagonist for the flashback scenes, another for the present-day investigation into the first man's death. More striking, because the action lacks flashbacks, is *So Ends Our Night* (1941). Two refugees meet briefly while fleeing Germany and separate at the end of the setup, about twenty-five minutes in. Either man might be a secondary character in the other's story, but both are given equal weight. The plot alternates scenes of each one fleeing across Europe as Nazi control expands. At intervals the men reunite by accident, but most of the running time contrasts their situations and ultimate fates.

This tactic is seen in less extreme form when the protagonist role shifts from one character to another. In *Red River* (1948), Thomas Dunson is initially marked as the protagonist before his brutality to his cowhands makes him the antagonist to Matthew Garth, the new leader of the cattle drive. Likewise, *White Heat* (1948), starting out by attaching us to Cody Jarrett and his gang, seems to be offering a classic gangster plot, with a villainous protagonist. But thirty minutes in, at the first turning point, we are introduced to the cop Hank Fallon, who will infiltrate the gang. He becomes our new protagonist, and Cody slips into the familiar role of antagonist.

Throughout, Fallon is morally conflicted; he must play a surrogate mother in order to gain Cody's trust. A similar complexity arises in the shifting roles we find in *The Sound of Fury* (1950). The early portion of the film is organized around Howard Tyler, a struggling workman who, needing money, falls in with a sociopathic robber. After the robber inveigles Howard into kidnapping and murder, both men are captured. The protagonist role shifts to a reporter, Gil Stanton, whose articles about the crime stir the

townsfolk to a frenzy. They form a mob, attack the jail, and lynch both men, leaving Gil to confront his responsibility.

In *Kings Row* (1942), two men pass the protagonist function back and forth. The film starts out focused on Parris Mitchell, a sensitive young man who grows up alongside his best friend Drake McHugh, the town rake. But the doctor Parris idolizes kills himself and the daughter Parris loved. He leaves Kings Row for Vienna, where he hopes to study the mind. A more orthodox medical plot, as in *Arrowsmith* (1931), would keep us attached to Parris, but following the source novel the emphasis shifts to a new protagonist, Drake. The central action involves his failed courtship of the daughter of the town's most powerful doctor. After the doctor has wreaked a terrible vengeance on him, Drake is nursed back to health by Randy, the girl from across the tracks. But now the bedridden Drake becomes passive and despairing. Parris's return to Kings Row forces him to rebuild both his life and Drake's.

The protagonist's role can fluctuate sharply in war films, since wayward secondary characters must be assigned crucial actions —a dangerous mission, a suicidal charge—that reform them and lift them to prominence for a while. *Eagle Squadron* (1942) and *Flying Tigers* (1942) give subplots fleshed-out action and longish running times. A more powerfully shifting dynamic is evident in *They Were Expendable* (1945). It starts out firmly centered on Lieutenant Brickley, with Rusty Ryan as his loyal second in command of a torpedo-boat squadron. But when Rusty is wounded in action, the plot splits, and we follow him to the hospital and see his growing love for a nurse, Sandy. The lovers are torn apart by evacuation. The ensuing action centers principally on Rusty, who gets separated from Brick. Eventually they reconnect and find their squadron before, under orders, they fly to safety while their crew is left to die. The effect of shifting the protagonist's role to and fro is to balance Brick's self-possessed managing of military strategy (he is never given a wife or a past) with Rusty's more emotional reaction to the fighting, keyed to his love for Sandy—whom he will probably never see again. Switching the protagonist's role supplies complementary perspectives on the war.

In most films, one or two characters hold the spotlight, and their lines of action intersect with the backstories of subsidiary

characters. But dramatize those backstories more fully, trace out their causal trajectories, and you necessarily give these characters more space and greater causal power. As subplots swell, secondary characters start to become protagonists.

The multiple-protagonist schema can invite us to draw comparisons among characters. In "Night of the Blizzard," one working girl chooses paid sex, one chooses a career, and one chooses true love. In its construction the story looks forward to John Klempner's novel *A Letter to Five Wives* (1945), which would become the basis of the 1948 film *Letter to Three Wives*.

A clear-cut instance of multiple-protagonist parallels is *Three Strangers* (1946). A prologue tells us that the three main characters "really have nothing to do with each other." Yet "their separate stories might have been different except for what happened that night. And then again, perhaps not." A woman meets two men on the street and brings them to her apartment, where all agree to share a sweepstakes ticket. They go their own ways, and the plot then follows each one, with some alternation. The three characters' adventures have a rough equivalence, since each centers on a crisis (the woman is spurned, one man is involved in a murder trial, the other becomes an embezzler). The trio reunite one evening to learn if they've won the prize, but what has happened to them in the meantime recasts their bargain. As befits a story and screenplay by John Huston, their quest for riches proves futile.

Hollywood has always favored threes, but often the title suggests a parity that doesn't emerge. Such films create a sense of "first among equals," where the apparent equivalence of three pals or relatives gives way to centering the spotlight on one. *Three on a Match* (1932), *Three Smart Girls* (1936), *Three Comrades* (1938), and *Three Girls about Town* (1941) all emphasize one prime character, with the others supplying help or plot complications. *On the Town* (1949), bringing a trio of sailors to New York for a day's leave, favors Gabey's search for Miss Turnstiles. Such plots don't lose the sense of character parallels, but they do make some figures less pivotal.

Something similar happens in the rare films announcing four protagonists. *Four Girls in White* (1939) brings in nurse trainees

who serve as foils for the capricious Norma, who must learn her proper duties. *Four Daughters* (1938) and *Four Wives* (1939) give the Lemp siblings a fair degree of autonomy, but the central action pivots on the twists and turns of Ann's romantic life, however much her story might be braided with her sisters'.

Two 1946 films depicting the adjustment problems of the returning warrior vividly illustrate some schemas available at the period. *Till the End of Time* is based on a 1944 novel that suggests a cross section of outcomes, tracing the lives of five Marine buddies who are decommissioned.[14] The book's plot concentrates on two of them, the young Cliff and the much older Gunny, while the three others—a Jew, a black man, and a Native American—enter the action at various points. The film changes the situation, narrowing the returning vets to three nonminority men. Bill has a severe head trauma, while Bill's pal Perry has lost his legs. Eventually Perry learns to use his artificial legs, and Bill comes to accept medical help from the government.

Perhaps as a departure from therapeutic films like *Pride of the Marines* (1945), *Till the End of Time* doesn't dwell on the men with physical injuries. Bill and Perry are relegated to subplots, and most of their action develops behind the scenes. Concentrating on Cliff, the plot emphasizes the dislocation of the physically healthy but disturbed and angry young man. He refuses to choose a new life and soon becomes interested only in his sputtering romance with a young war widow with adjustment problems of her own. Cliff has come back to a new society, where the young people seem childish and old people don't really understand why he is afraid to start a future. The war has taken him out of time for three years. Only the support of the widow allows him to make a start on his own.

The Samuel Goldwyn production *The Best Years of Our Lives* adopts a more truly cross-sectional structure. Each of its three protagonists—the sailor Homer, the infantryman Al, and the tail-gunner Fred—could have provided a film on his own. By having them meet by chance at the start and then intercutting their lives thereafter, as in the "Blizzard" short story, the film permits a fine array of parallels. The men represent three branches of the service, three age cohorts, three classes within Boone City society,

and three different paths to adjusting to the postwar world. The intercut scenes tend to offer comparisons between the men's problems with money, family, and a place in the postwar world. Both Al and Homer, for instance, want to delay the moment of homecoming because they dread facing their families. The film's exceptional length allows each story line to bring in several secondary characters, each vividly characterized by a distinct attitude to the returning vets.

Till the End of Time resolves the men's situations in one climactic barroom fight with right-wing con men, but *Best Years* has the leisure to space out the turning points in each line of action. Al the banker has the easiest time reintegrating, so his story is the simplest. When he gets a raise and is put in charge of veterans' loans, he must push against the bank's reluctance to take a chance on men with nothing but war experience and hope. Al's personal crisis arrives when at a dinner in his honor he tipsily argues that banks risk nothing compared with what soldiers risked for their country.

Homer's line of action is more complicated, but it fits the classic therapeutic model. He's usually adept with the hooks replacing his hands, but around his family he becomes clumsy. He's convinced that his girlfriend Wilma doesn't deserve the burden of taking care of him. The climax of his story line comes, in one of the great scenes of forties cinema, when he reveals the stumps of his arms to Wilma, thinking she'll be repelled. Instead she gently helps him button his pajama top. That moment is capped in the film's epilogue by a delicately suspenseful moment at his wedding, when his hooks must slip the wedding ring onto Wilma's finger.

Fred is first among equals; more screen time is devoted to him because his reentry is bumpiest. With no marketable skills and a good-time wife he barely knows, he finds that the months in a plane's gunnery cone were the high point of his life. If Homer feels shame before his family, Fred feels inadequate to the newly modernized drugstore where he once jerked sodas. Retaking his old job, he finds that his prissy former assistant is now his boss. Worse, he is plagued with nightmares about the loss of a pal in a fiery bombardment. As Fred's marriage disintegrates, two men's plots weave together: Fred has fallen in love with Al's daughter

3.1. *The Best Years of Our Lives*: In the center, the oldest couple Milly and Al; on the right, the newly married couple Homer and Wilma; on the left foreground and center, Al and Peggy, the couple-to-be.

Peggy. This creates a new crisis, when Al intervenes to break up the romance and thereby loses Fred's friendship.

Fred's story line resolves last, when he crawls into a junked plane and cathartically relives his wartime trauma. Willing to humble himself as a scrap-metal worker, he starts his return to life, with Peggy preparing to join him. The parallel with Al is maintained: as Al helps returning servicemen get loans, Fred recycles discarded bombers for peacetime uses.

The title cuts many ways. Fred's wife complains that she gave him the best years of her life, though she lived comfortably on his allotment checks. The stronger suggestion is that it was the men who gave their country their prime years. At Homer and Wilma's wedding, a shot of three couples posits that the best years may just be starting (fig. 3.1). In such ways a multiple-protagonist plot, offering carefully spaced climaxes that lead to a beneficent convergence of fates, can present itself as a survey of human experience.

ALL TOGETHER, YET APART

Spreading the protagonist function can yield a less tightly wound plot, one that might be called episodic. One possibility is that several characters bound by kinship or friendship may pursue disparate goals. This process often gets played out in the family drama. Alternatively, as in the combat film, the equally weighted characters tend to share a collective goal. In either case the plot may turn scrappy and anecdotal.

A family drama needn't lack a protagonist. MGM's Andy Hardy series of the 1930s presents Andy with the familiar double

problem, romance and something else (work, school, money). But often his father, Judge Hardy, has a problem as well, and Andy's misadventures help resolve that subplot.

By contrast, the 1940s sees the development of family dramas that give members a gradation of roles, from small side projects (that can, properly planted, still yield plot twists) to major parts. The result resembles what Nicola Humble has called the "eccentric family" plot in middlebrow women's literature, derived from *Little Women*.[15] By granting every sibling a distinct talent and cluster of problems, this plot tends to spread the protagonist function among several characters. A film example is the third in Warners' Lemp family series, *Four Mothers* (1940). Now Ann is no longer central; the spotlight shifts across several lines of action, each showing characters working to solve communal problems.

A family-based plot can steer toward anecdotal construction. Who, to take a prime instance, is the protagonist of *Life with Father* (1947)? The patriarch Clare Day has no goal except to maintain the domestic routine of ruling his family; if anything, he's an antagonist. His wife, Vinnie, conceives the aim of getting him baptized, but she formulates that goal forty-five minutes into the film. The eldest son, Clarence, wants a new suit, but he takes few steps to get one until late in the plot. His budding romance with the visiting girl Mary is blocked when he imitates his father's high-handedness. Another brother is building a burglar alarm, while a third is learning his catechism. Each project develops through the film, but nothing very dramatic hangs on any of them.

The action of *Life with Father* progresses in chunks, starting from one day in the household and proceeding to a visit from relatives, the mother's illness, and eventually the scheme to get Clare baptized. Each family member pursues minor goals, which are interwoven and occasionally interdependent. For example, Vinnie deftly confuses Clare about household accounts in order to get Clarence his suit. The chief climax is caused inadvertently. Two of the brothers sell patent medicines. They dump some in their mother's tea, Vinnie falls ill, and Clare soothes her by promising to get baptized. (Then he backs out.) Apart from this accidental drama, everyday domestic routines and incidents are cross-

threaded by running gags: changing maids, Clare's opposition to cabs, an offensive rubber plant.

Something similar happens in *I Remember Mama* (1948). The daughter Katrin is our center of consciousness, but her memories consist of distinct crises revolving around different family members and their short-term goals. Mama sneaks into the hospital to be near the seriously ill Dagmar; Dagmar tries to keep her cat alive; Katrin yearns for a comb and brush set; the dying Uncle Chris leaves money for the youngest son's operation; and finally Mama helps Katrin sell a story she's written. As in *Life with Father*, these episodes are bound together not only within Katrin's flashback frame but through recurring motifs—centrally Mama's bank account, which plays a role in nearly every section.

Both *Life with Father* and *I Remember Mama* began their literary careers as collections of short stories. They were then woven into Broadway plays with tighter dramatic structures, and these in turn guided the screenplays. Each film became a compromise, a blend of episodes highlighting major characters and minor ones, largely lacking the clear-cut protagonists hallowed by Hollywood tradition. In *I Remember Mama*, a coming-of-age arc is suggested, but classical causality is nonetheless replaced by loose chronology.

That chronology could be filled in by characters reacting to a larger historical process. In preparing *How Green Was My Valley* (1941), Zanuck and screenwriter Philip Dunne cut away the portions of the original novel showing the grown-up Huw Morgan. In the film, Huw as a boy became less a protagonist and more a center of consciousness, witness to the vicissitudes of others' lives.[16] There is plenty of conflict, but it springs largely from the family's reaction to circumstances they can't control. The luminous opening passages, when the Morgan family is secure in tradition and Bronwyn comes to be Ivor's wife, give way to a steady disintegration. Sons leave, the daughter is wed to a cold rich man, the miners' wages are cut and a strike is launched, and the family suffers a string of serious accidents, including two mine collapses. There is the possibility at the film's end that Angharad will leave her marriage and join the man she's always loved, the reverend

Mr. Gruffydd, but that is left open. Huw's full growth to manhood is elided because the death of the father signals the end of the community that flourished in the valley.

Mrs. Miniver (1942) has no anchoring viewpoint character, but its porous construction is partly due to its source in a series of newspaper feuilletons, and partly due to the inevitably reactive role of a family during Hitler's attack on England. The war appeared only at the end of the newspaper series, but it was made central to the film's plot. That plot built its through lines out of village incidents such as a flower-growing competition, Nazi incursions (a downed pilot, a bombardment), and the courtship and marriage of the Minivers' son and a peer's daughter. At the climax the script prepares us for the son, now an aviator, to die in battle, but instead another family member is killed with almost pitiless abruptness.

A less well-known family drama, *I Want You* (1951), was sometimes taken as a *Best Years* of the Korean War. Produced by Goldwyn and starring Dana Andrews (Fred Derry of the earlier film), it puts fathers, brothers, and sons at the center of home front entanglements. No fewer than thirteen characters are drawn into decisions about whether the men, both young and old, should seek deferments or go off to fight. Each major character must settle on a goal. The dramatic crises are fairly muted, and there are some devastatingly bitter moments, as when one wife insists her husband take down all the war decorations in the house, and he admits he wasn't the war hero he has pretended to be.

Perhaps the most extreme example of anecdotal construction in the domestic drama came from the wild boy of 1940s literature, William Saroyan. One of his stories' protagonists spoke for him in noting, "I want to tell this simple story in my own way, forgetting the rules of rhetoric, the tricks of composition."[17] *The Human Comedy* began life as an excessively long screenplay that Saroyan had hoped to direct. MGM declined it, but producer-director Clarence Brown found it captivating and had the script chopped down to normal size. In the meantime the annoyed Saroyan rushed his original work into print as a novel, which was published simultaneously with the film's release.

The Human Comedy was greeted by James Agee as "an effort to create, through a series of lyrically casual, almost plotless scenes, the image of a good family in a good town in wartime."[18] Many observers agreed that the movie was shapeless, and at first glance it does seem pretty rambling. As a fresco of life on the home front, it lacks villains, characters with long-term goals, and anything like continuing conflict. It consists largely of episodes of people trying to be kind to one another. Its title revises both Dante—this comedy is human, not divine—and Balzac: it's a panorama not of social vanities and vices, but of everyday decency.

It has a protagonist, the teenage Homer Macauley, but like Huw Morgan he is for the most part reactive. The film's through line is created by Homer's routines and family life across three days and then, several months later, a fourth day. We see him at home with his sister Bess, his little brother Ulysses, and their mother; at school where he unsuccessfully woos a rich girl; on the sports field; and in the telegraph office where he works nights delivering telegrams. Homer starts learning about life his first night on the job, when he must read a Hispanic woman the telegram notifying her of her son's death. By the end, by suffering loss and displaying tact and responsibility, Homer has become a man.

Each major character who comes in contact with Homer gets a cluster of scenes that celebrate modest virtues and the pleasures and mysteries of daily living. Ulysses studies a gopher, watches a train pass, visits the public library, and learns what it's like to be scared. Bess and her friend Mary go out to the movies with three lonely GIs. Tom Spangler, the supervisor of the telegraph office, lets himself be courted by the wealthy Diana Steed. The plot inserts scenes of Homer's brother Marcus on his way to war, sharing thoughts with his friend Tobey George.

The plot isn't utterly meandering; the film's opening half-hour introduces all the key characters and their attitudes toward life. What makes the film seem plotless is that certain standard actions have been excised. Clarence Brown confessed himself happy to avoid "the confining restraints that go with the stagnant dramatic form. . . . There was no 'boy meets girl' situation to clutter the sweep of the picture."[19] Nobody is keeping any melo-

dramatic secrets from anyone else, so there's nothing to arouse mystery or suspense. Bess and Mary talk of leaving college and taking jobs, but they promptly accept Mrs. Macauley's advice to stay in school. The film features two romances but no love triangles. Homer's efforts to win the attention of a snobbish rich girl quickly come to nothing. Tom has no rival for Diana, and the only obstacle to their union is his hesitation about fitting into her milieu. That's dispelled when her parents and friends prove to be regular folks. In the army Marcus and Tobey exhibit no male horseplay or bravado. Instead they talk about their childhoods and the importance of prayer. This is perhaps the most frictionless movie of the 1940s.

The Human Comedy lacks conflict, but it doesn't lack drama. The good-natured telegrapher Willie Grogan, driven to alcoholism partly because of the grim messages he receives every day, dies at his desk—just as he picks up news of the death of Marcus. Only a few scenes before, Homer has read aloud Marcus's last letter home, in which the older brother anticipates that he will not be coming back. This stretch of the film does duty for a traditional crisis and climax. Death has been present from the start: the film is narrated by the dead Macauley father, and Homer's first task as delivery boy is to carry news of a lost son. Coming home that night, he confesses he is at a loss: "People are in such trouble. . . . Almost everything you find out is sad." Against this Our Townish backdrop, the small joys of family, companionship, work, and play become even more precious.

The film rests on a rhythm of replacements. Homer's father is dead, but telegrapher Willie functions as a surrogate. Marcus is away on duty, so Tom becomes Homer's big brother, teaching him how to clear a hurdle and how to deal with grief. Just before Marcus is lost in battle, Tom has enlisted in the navy: one small-town boy takes the place of another. No sooner has Homer been told he's now the man of the house than along comes Marcus's army buddy Tobey, demobilized for his combat injury. An orphan, Tobey has long yearned for a home, and he has fallen in love with Bess on seeing Marcus's picture of her. Striding into the household to announce Marcus's death, Homer calls out to the waiting women, "The soldier's come home!" before ushering Tobey in.

Theme and pattern mesh. What could seem an almost ghoulish sense of replaceable parts, one son swapped for another, is a culmination of the film's version of the grand cycle of existence, the human comedy as a homely variant of the divine one. But the exchange of roles is also a solution to the problem of structure in a film veering toward a slice-of-life treatment. "I wrote this story for myself, not for the studio," Saroyan remarked. "But I'm glad they like it. Plot? What's plot? Nothing. The form is everything."[20]

ALL FOR ONE, UP TO A POINT

In these family sagas, some characters go beyond being simply subplot material. Alongside a more or less static protagonist, they take turns in the spotlight. And the overall dynamics of *I Want You*, *Life with Father*, *I Remember Mama*, and *The Human Comedy* show people bound together yet pursuing their individual projects.

What, though, if the people act in concert? What if the film lacks a clear-cut protagonist but gives a specific purpose to the group as a whole?

The heist or caper film is one prototype of the common-goal plot. *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950) may be the earliest full-blown instance, and its dispersed structure is derived from its source novel by W. R. Burnett. The goal is a jewel robbery, and each crook is assigned both a specialized skill and a distinct personal situation (family, friends, helpers).

The film doesn't pick out a single protagonist. The action begins and ends with Dix Handley, the muscle, but Doc Riedenschneider, the planner, claims the most onscreen time (over an hour). These two characters are emphasized in the final portions, when they escape together and eventually separate, each to find a different fate. Yet other characters are dwelt on longer than their role as helpers would normally permit. In particular the conniving lawyer Emmerich, who bankrolls the job, is revealed to be cheating on his wife and planning to steal the gang's loot. Structurally, the go-between Cobby is also important as the "node" that brings together the entire gang, and as the crook who ultimately informs on them.

One can trace some earlier, partial efforts in this direction. The heist at the center of *Criss Cross* (1949) is one instance, although that remains centered on one protagonist. *Brute Force* (1947), whose main action, a prison break beginning in the complicating action portion, shares out the protagonist role to some degree among the convicts planning their escape. Going still further back, the couple's detailed planning of the murder in *Double Indemnity* (1944) provides a schema that could be expanded to include several characters.

The most vivid 1940s model of the shared-project plot, though, is provided by the genre of combat films. The new material provided by wartime conditions invited writers and directors to experiment with a collective narrative structure. Occasionally they could flirt with the slice-of-life quality that, as we'll see, the *Grand Hotel* model seemed to promise.

In the wake of High Modernism and its middlebrow versions, combat literature could fragment and disperse story action. The Great War novel *Company K* (1933) by William March had presented 131 brief scenes on the battlefield and the home front, each told in the first person and without a clear-cut narrative line. Comparable fragmentation occurs in Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), a novel marked by the influence of Dos Passos. Peter Bowman's *Beach Red* (1945), an account of a landing on a hostile island, is more experimental. The protagonist is unnamed, called simply "you," and most of the book is taken up with trivial action. Moreover, the text is composed of ten-word lines, each line representing one second of story time, with the whole book presenting merely one hour of action.

Nothing so audacious can be found in the Hollywood combat film, but it does modify some classical conventions. While prizing vivid physical action, many war movies give their characters a passivity unusual in classical dramaturgy. Independent action is usually forbidden to soldiers, except in tight spots calling for quick decisions. The heroes and their helpers are often at the mercy of larger forces—the routines of military life, the demands of strategy and tactics, and the unforeseen maneuvers of the enemy.

Combat plots might seem to pose a problem for traditional

studio storytelling: How do you create forward-moving action for characters who are simply following orders? In certain circumstances you can pit your single protagonist against a skeptical establishment. *Destroyer* (1943) centers on a World War I veteran demonstrating that he still has a contribution to make to the war effort. The combat film can also accommodate a romantic triangle, as in *Eagle Squadron* (1942) and *The Fighting Seabees* (1944).

More often the action centers on a leading-edge protagonist who is vividly characterized and, when assigned a mission, carries his unit to victory. By following orders that at first seem wrongheaded, the paratroop captain of *Objective, Burma!* (1945) takes his men to safety. The leader must be resourceful, but he need not be flawless. *Desperate Journey* (1942), an Errol Flynn vehicle, is often characterized as a breezy adventure behind enemy lines, but the mission's problems are the result of the protagonist's recklessness, and by the end he has learned to be more prudent. A more tormented protagonist-leader is Lieutenant Anderson in *Halls of Montezuma* (1951), a man who is so war-weary that he becomes literally sick with fear.

Alternatively, the protagonist may be a member of the team who learns the ways of war. The louche Ted Lawson, who signs up with Doolittle to firebomb Japan in *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo* (1944), must become a sober adult who sacrifices a leg to the greater cause. *The Eve of St. Mark* (1944) centers on a young enlistee, Quizz, who leaves behind his family and his girlfriend. In an equivocal ending—he may or may not survive under Japanese fire—he sends word to his loved ones that he will always be with them. The passivity assigned the soldier is an occasion to learn the value of the mission.

The characters' lack of individual agency can yield narrative benefits. Once the goal is defined from above, the plot can be fleshed out with subsidiary dramas and characterizations of several team members.[21] Through voice-over and flashbacks, the men under Anderson in *Halls of Montezuma* are given considerable dramatic weight. In *The Eve of St. Mark*, Quizz's maturing is defined by his role as an observer of other men, and their personal stories take center stage from time to time. The opening

credits of many war pictures identify the players through pictures and character names.

In *Destination Tokyo* (1944), Cary Grant plays the submarine captain, and his departure from his wife and his reunion with her at the end frame the mission. Still, he is absent from long stretches of the film, which assigns a good deal of screen time to his colorful crew. One is a good-natured cook, another a bragging Lothario who proves unexpectedly reliable. Another crewman, refusing to go on deck to honor a fallen comrade, angrily explains that he pours all his grief into his hatred of the Nazis. *Stand by for Action* (1943) concentrates its first two sections on the clash of a rich slacker who is second in command to a gung-ho ship's captain. But the film's third part characterizes the rest of the crew when they find a lifeboat full of women and babies.

From early in the war, some combat films democratize their structure still further. There will be a leader, typically an officer who defines the mission and bolsters morale as necessary, but he may seldom be onscreen. The bulk of the film traces the efforts of several soldiers or sailors or pilots to achieve the goals laid down for them. The role of protagonist is shared out fairly evenly.

Along with the need to cooperate in a collective mission—the teamwork that many a hothead has to learn to accept—there comes a string of personal goals. Each fighter is likely to have something else driving him: patriotism, lust for adventure, revenge against the Japanese, or the need to overcome cowardice. By raising subordinate characters to greater saliency, the combat film presents an arena in which each fighter can test his values and moral strength.

Wake Island (1942) provides a prototype. In early 1941 a commander and his lieutenant, along with a grumpy civilian engineer, come to Wake to set up a Marine outpost. There they join two pals who quarrel like Quirt and Flagg in *What Price Glory?* (1927). After the hostilities start, the plot provides each man with privileged moments. The engineer volunteers his expertise to build dugouts for the inevitable casualties, and the lieutenant learns that his wife was killed in the Pearl Harbor attack. "From the time a man can remember," says the commander, "his main memories are those given to him by women."

The combat film taught screenwriters that they could build a plot out of such moments, with characterization given in sharp but understated strokes. By the time of *The Story of G.I. Joe* (1945), any sense of a larger mission or target has shrunk to a series of vignettes along an endless, muddy march. In one sequence, men camped at night listen to Artie Shaw on a Berlin radio show. When the swing music stops, Axis Sally's urging them to surrender rouses each soldier to both anger and erotic frustration. Across five minutes, close shots dwell on their faces. One retires happy: "Tonight I dream in Technicolor." The sexual motif pervades the film; there's even a battleground wedding. One can't easily imagine another genre that would linger so long on largely unidentified characters, and at a point when no major drama is occurring.

The rigid structure of military routine allows screenwriters to embroider characters who would usually be very peripheral. All the briefings, drills, meals, morning shaves, burials, hospital visits, mail calls, and stretches of waiting become occasions for sharpening the differences among the team. The overarching clash of armies gets filled out with small-scale quarrels, mental breakdowns, and struggles with rain and heat and blizzards. Add to this the unpredictability of an attack, which can interrupt any scene, and the screenwriter can build up a spectrum of significance through scenes of tension and stretches of down time. Some characters will be minor, given a few tics or traits. Others will be more dynamically integrated into larger dramas. And still others can become, over longer stretches of the film, "delegated" protagonists, carrying a good deal of weight.

Two films about women in combat reveal some schematic options. *Cry "Havoc"* (1944), adapted from a Broadway play, confines its action largely to one setting, an underground bunker. Thirteen refugee women have volunteered to serve as nurses in Bataan. The military nurses in charge are strained, and one, Mary, is suffering from malaria. Beset by air raids and the flood of wounded men, the women reveal their personalities and problems. One Englishwoman, who has gone out in search of the man she loves, comes back traumatized. Another volunteer is a burlesque dancer who softens her tough veneer, while a wealthy woman is unable to adjust to the pressure. Pat, a flirt, tries to

seduce Lieutenant Holt, the barely seen commander who seems to be Mary's beau.

The women argue, console one another, care for one another and their patients, and come to respect each other. At the end the women, unified by their ordeal, agree to step out of the bunker to surrender to the Japanese. While Mary's story predominates (she is played by the biggest star, Margaret Sullavan), she is absent from the screen for about fifty minutes of a ninety-five-minute film. As if to compensate, she is virtually the only character we see alone for any extended period. The plot of *Cry "Havoc"* gives its characters varying degrees of prominence, with each contributing to the collective drama.

The similar *So Proudly We Hail* (1943) employs an extended flashback to present the harrowing experience of army nurses on Corregidor. When rescued, their lieutenant, Janet, is in a numb trance, and three of her colleagues explain what happened in their hospital. Although Janet is the protagonist, a good deal of the action involves the other women, particularly Joan, who flirts with a football hero, and Olivia, a cold, raging survivor of Pearl Harbor. The women's days are filled with oppressive routines, tending to the wounded and bracing themselves under the pressure of the encroaching enemy. Janet's story line, culminating in the departure of the medic she loves, gets pride of place, but significant sections are devoted to Joan and to Olivia. Olivia is given a climactic scene of self-sacrifice when she calmly walks out to face the Japanese with a grenade.

The shared ordeal in *So Proudly We Hail* is enhanced by a shifting voice-over in the present that passes among Janet's colleagues. Similarly, two male-centered films from 1943 carry the collective plot structure into their voice-over narration. *Guadalcanal Diary*, respecting the chronicle quality implied by its title, supplies a voice-over commentary issuing from a character we almost never see, the correspondent accompanying the mission. The role of protagonist is spread out piecemeal among several characters, including tolerant and teasing oldsters, jumpy recruits, and a hillbilly who imitates Gary Cooper's turkey calls in *Sergeant York*. Similarly, *Gung Ho!* presents a documentary-tinged account of Marines training for a raider battalion and executing

their mission after a long trip packed into a submarine. Again, the voice-over commentary supplies a sense of group solidarity, this time in a "we" form that gives the men a collective voice.

As ever, variations and combinations come to light. In *A Walk in the Sun* (1946), the opening setup doesn't distinguish Sergeant Tyne (Dana Andrews) much beyond the colorful other characters, who get more screen time than he does. After landing at the beach near Salerno, a platoon of soldiers is left without their leader, and the ranking sergeant goes out in search of a captain. The men wait. Eventually the narration attaches itself to Tyne, and his role expands. As his senior officer becomes increasingly traumatized, Tyne has to take charge.

The protagonist of *A Walk in the Sun* emerges out of the group. By contrast, in *Air Force* (1943), the apparent protagonist drops out of the plot and the group must carry on. We start with a strongly marked individual, the pilot Quincannon, but he is killed thirty minutes before the end. No new leader inherits his role. The airmen, who have hopscotched to Pearl Harbor, to Wake Island, and on to Manila, must get their ailing plane back in the air and lead a ferocious counterattack on the Japanese navy. *Variety* commented that the film's true star was the *Mary Ann*, the plane occupying over fifty minutes of screen time, but this impression arises partly because the group, rather than a new leader, comes to the fore in the film's climax.[22]

Battleground (1949) exemplifies the advantages that the combat film offered the anecdotal, multiple-protagonist format. Most of the dozen or so major characters are introduced in an opening scene showing them sharing a tent as the raw newcomer, Jim Layton, tries to find a spot to sleep. The scene introduces several interwoven story lines. With no overarching mission to dominate the action, scenes are built around immediate goals and concrete incidents.

No character takes command, and apart from the combats, almost every scene springs from a specific character's situation. An old soldier has been called back to civilian life, but not in time to escape the battle. A Hispanic recruit from California joyfully discovers snow; he will soon be buried in it. Van Johnson, airman hero of *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo*, is here demoted to a leering,

faintly cowardly grunt eager to steal eggs for a clandestine breakfast. At one point he seems to be running from the fight. Or is he outflanking the enemy? The newcomer Jim wonders, and we can't be sure either.

Battleground underscores motifs of discomfort: one man's false teeth click in his sleep, another's feet are damaged, but not quite enough to keep him out of action, and a tall redneck can't fit into regulation galoshes. There's also a character arc, as Jim learns to smoke and eventually adopts the casual cynicism of his buddies. The shared project of earlier war films has withered—no longer a heroic mission, instead mere survival—and the vignettes of life in combat have become the substance of the film.

A Walk in the Sun and *Battleground* achieved the highest box office take of all combat films set during World War II. Coming late in the cycle, they managed to capitalize on the storytelling strategies that had proved robust in earlier entries.[23] Like *The Human Comedy*, they showed that the episodic dramatic model could occasionally be achieved in Hollywood—here, by acknowledging the sheer slog of men and women fighting a war.

From the lone protagonist to the couple and then to varieties of multiple protagonists, plotting in the 1940s opened up many options.[24] The single- and dual-protagonist templates were well established, and scores of filmmakers used them with the neat craft and vitality on display in *Five Graves to Cairo* and *Cover Girl*. Alongside them, however, alternatives emerged. Filmmakers' focus on causal patterns with precise goals and exact deadlines sometimes gave way to a looser arrangement. Causality might be more diffuse and goals more vague, all in an atmosphere of leisurely unfolding rather than suspense.

Those alternatives owed something to literature, certainly, but they can also be considered revisions of schemas already in place. The family saga expands on classical geometry, raising subplots to new prominence; the war film gives up the sense of one big mission and concentrates on sheer dailiness. Goals, broadly defined, remain prominent—sustain the family, beat the enemy, survive the battle—but they put less pressure on certain scenes. The family saga welcomes simple chronology, perhaps enclosed

in a nostalgic frame story. The war film could forgo the demands of tight plotting in the name of realism (deglamorized combat) and the possibility of deeper characterization, of dramatizing different reactions to war. In a few short years, unusual plot schemas, in Jean-Claude Carrière's description of movie innovation, "took shape and branched out."

INTERLUDE

Schema and Revision, between Rounds

INNOVATION CAN SOMETIMES SMACK OF DESPERATION. *Ringside* (1949) presents us with two brothers who are handy with their fists. Joe struggles to box his way to the top, while Mike wants to become a concert pianist. When Joe's optic nerve is damaged in a sparring match, he insists on going ahead with his career, only to be blinded in a major bout. Mike takes up prizefighting himself, eventually getting to a championship. Winning the purse enables him to pay for Joe's eye surgery and underwrite his new career as a musician.

As a decidedly B project, released by Robert Lippert's independent company. *Ringside* needs something to pep up its formulaic story. Accordingly, the movie begins with a shot of a boxing ring in the empty arena. A voice comes up to explain: "Quiet, isn't it? . . . I can tell you of many strange things that have happened within my ropes. . . . The house was jammed that night . . ." At the end we come out of the flashback, and the ring concludes, "And thus I lost the fighting O'Haras—and incidentally, my one and only decision—to Frédéric Chopin."

Significantly, the ring's voice-over isn't heard elsewhere in the film. The narration doesn't guide us through the action the way the voice of the Dane house weaves through *Enchantment* (1948). The talking ring remains a simple switcheroo, an inexpensive way

to distinguish *Ringside* from other fight films of 1947–50.[1] Its preposterous effort to stand out, though, is only a matter of degree. Each of the films in this cycle differentiates itself by drawing on narrative options of the period. Variations emerged across just a few years; the 1940s ecosystem created new niches with surprising speed.

THREE CHAMPS

One of the most durable conventions of the prizefighting film is the climactic bout that decides whether the hero becomes champion. Some films, like *Golden Boy* (1939) and *Gentleman Jim* (1942), trace the fighter's rise in chronological fashion and conclude with the big match. An alternative option that was salient in the 1940s is to open the film at a point of crisis. *Ringside* doesn't do that, but other films start with the crucial bout and then skip back to show what led up to it. And each of those uses the strategy to different effect.

Mike Angelo, the protagonist of *Whiplash* (1948), has just staggered to his corner after a severe mauling. Gasping for breath before the next round, Mike gives us an inner monologue. "What am I doin' here, waitin' for the kiss-off?" The narration flashes back to the beginning of the tale, presenting Mike as an aspiring artist making a sand sculpture at the beach.

The opening crisis of *Whiplash* invokes more than the vague expectations of *Ringside*. Seeing Mike beaten down, we expect some answers to why he dazedly murmurs that he got into a fixed fight and why he declares his independence of someone ("I'm not your boy"). If you know the genre, you might also infer that he will be rebelling against crooked managers we haven't yet met. And the juxtaposition of his bleary-eyed, sweaty face with the tranquil California seaside certainly arouses some curiosity: How does a landscape painter wind up in a prizefight?

The bulk of the film is taken up by the flashback. When Mike finds that one of his paintings has sold to what he calls a "phantom lady," his pursuit of her plunges him into the boxing world. She's married to a ruthless fight promoter, and to prove his toughness and stay near her, Mike agrees to become a boxer. The film

approaches its climax when the promoter tells Mike to throw the fight. Mike doesn't know he has a concussion, but the promoter does, and he expects him to be killed in the ring. The return to the present resumes the fight we saw at the start. Mike wins, and the promoter dies accidentally. The epilogue puts Mike back on the beach, enfolding the phantom lady in an embrace.

A few months after *Whiplash* was released there appeared *Champion* (1949). Again, the point of attack is late. We start with Midge Kelly striding to the ring with his handlers as the crowd cheers. In the ring Midge turns to beam at the audience as we hear the radio announcer call him "the most popular champion in this division. . . . a boy who rose from the depths of poverty to become champion of the world." That's all we have before Midge frowns briefly and an abrupt flashback takes us back to his days as a tramp, riding in a boxcar with his brother Connie.

This introduction is skimpier and less suspenseful than that of *Whiplash*. Midge has attained what the pugs of *Ringside* and *Whiplash* were striving for. Moreover, he's loved by the fans. But this first impression gets chipped away in the course of the film. Midge is revealed as an egoist who walks over others to get to the top. He abandons his mother, betrays Connie, cheats his manager, and leaves his wife for other women. (There's also the suggestion that he commits marital rape.) The flashback isn't motivated as a memory or a tale told by someone. It is presented "externally," as the start of a challenge to the image of the wholesome athlete.

At the climax, our return to the present drives home the flashback's debunking message. In the dressing room, Connie says Midge has become more brutal than ever, and as if to prove it Midge flattens his lame brother. The film's opening is selectively replayed through attachment to Connie as he follows Midge's retinue into the arena. Hearing the announcer's "most popular champion" phrase again, we invest it with a new meaning: The suckers have fallen for Midge's public image. And Midge's sudden glare at the end of the lead-in is now revealed as his defiant return of Connie's accusing stare.

The fight becomes savage, and the bloodied Midge manages to win. But back in his dressing room he collapses and dies of a brain hemorrhage. Asked for a comment by a reporter, Connie

pulls his punch: "He was a champion. He went out like a champion. He was a credit to the fight game to the end." As often happens, the film has taken us behind the scenes of a sordid business, but the characters maintain the facade. The flashback has revealed both the racket and the brutality of men hungry for success (one side of Kirk Douglas's complex star persona). The film's title has become ironic.

The present-time opening portions of *Ringside*, *Whiplash*, and *Champion* run from thirty-three seconds to three minutes. The initial framing situation of *Body and Soul* (1947), one of the decade's first exposés of the fight racket, occupies nearly eleven minutes. The other films don't lay much of a breadcrumb trail, but this ample introduction allows screenwriter Abraham Polonsky and director Robert Rossen to pack the present-day sequences with a host of questions about what has led up to the situation we see.

Middleweight champion Charley Davis wakes up from a disturbed sleep shouting "Ben!" He leaves his training camp and drives to the city, on the way to the following night's title match. Charley visits his mother, who is fairly cold to him. His wife, Peg, turns away when he apologizes for something he said, and when he embraces her, his mother quietly demands, "Go away, Charley." He drifts to a nightclub, where he picks up a sultry chanteuse. Just before the fight, he meets with his promoter, Roberts, in his dressing room. Now the fix is in, and Charley must lose to collect the money he has bet against himself.

"Everybody dies," Roberts tells Charley. "Ben, Shorty, even you." This single line gives us a narrative itinerary for the flashback to come—Shorty and Ben, whoever they are, will die; and perhaps after the flashback Charley will too. At the end of the lead-in we get Charley's voice-over. "Everything down the drain. . . . All these years." Cue flashback to a banquet celebrating his first amateur victory.

The extended framing situation of *Body and Soul* conjures up mystery and foreshadows what the flashback will reveal. As in *Champion*, we know the protagonist will make it to the top; the question is how he gets there. *Champion*'s prologue doesn't hint at any of the stages along the way, but the opening of *Body and Soul* provides a virtual checklist. We will watch Charley betray his

mother, his wife, and his best friend Shorty. We will watch him succumb to the charms of the singer Anna and the manipulations of the promoter Roberts.

The situation we've seen at the film's start coalesces gradually, but the initial mystery of what happened to Ben is not resolved until the close of the flashback. Ben, the former champion and Charley's sparring partner, has stayed loyal to Charley throughout. The night before the bout, Ben urges Charley to fight for himself and ignore the mobsters. During a quarrel, the woozy Ben trips, falls, and dies. It's his death that has provoked the nightmare that roused Charlie at the film's start, a moment that is briefly replayed at the climax to bring us back to the present.

During this replay, the rest of the setup section—Charley leaving the camp, visiting his mother and Peg, and so on—is skipped over to carry us back to Charley's dressing room and the big fight. As the rounds grind on, Charley learns of Roberts's ultimate treachery: he has told the opponent to knock Charley out. Charley vows to win. When he does, he faces being punished by Roberts's hoods. As he leaves the arena he quotes Roberts's line back to him: "What you gonna do, kill me? Everybody dies."

Champion and *Body and Soul* crisply show how Hollywood's narrative ecosystem can play host to variants. In outline, the films are similar. The ambitious fighter will abandon loved ones, compromise with the mob, and fall for a seductress. *Body and Soul* marks out these steps twice, once fleetingly in the present-time opening, then more fully in the flashback stretch. Charley is tormented at the start of *Body and Soul*, and the narration teases us to wonder why. *Champion*, made two years later, initially doesn't question the hero's image. Midge is jaunty at his first appearance, which we'll learn to see as another sign of his callousness. The gradual revelation of Midge's betrayals during the flashback undercuts his good-guy image.

Looked at another way, *Champion*'s opening doesn't need to hint at the hero's faults. Those have already become conventional, thanks to films like *Body and Soul*. Perhaps this is why *Whiplash* varies the convention by giving us a more sensitive fighter and a happy ending. The easygoing young painter, driven

not by ambition but by ambivalent feelings of love, is unlikely to wind up wholly corrupted.

RINGSIDE IN "REAL TIME"

Three flashback films, then, with different strategies for setting up first impressions and managing time shifts. A month before *Champion* was released, another fight drama offered yet another variant. Again we're in a world of fixed matches, compromised fighters, and bystanders urging the protagonist to quit the game before it kills him. Again the plot starts at a high dramatic pitch: the night of the big bout. The novelty of *The Set-Up* (1949) is provided by yet another narrational approach. This time the controlling pattern depends not on rearranging story order but on concentrating story duration.

Instead of flashing back to earlier days, *The Set-Up* lets the climax unroll in the time it takes the film to screen. The camera cranes in on a street view showing a clock reading 9:05; the final shot will pull back from the same street and reveal the clock to be reading 10:16. Director Robert Wise made several versions of the final shot, with different clock times, so that he could fit one of the images to the film's final running time.

The concern to match running time and plot time is another forties innovation; I know of nothing comparable in earlier films (though it's not unknown in theater). But the temporal concentration creates problems. The climax will be the big bout, and there, as in *Whiplash* and *Champion*, the protagonist Stoker must decide whether to throw the fight or try to win honestly. But agonizing over the decision might not be enough to sustain the action, especially since *The Set-Up* doesn't dramatize the backstory as the other fight films do. The solution found by Wise and screenwriter Art Cohn is to delay the protagonist's awareness that the fix is in. We learn at the start that Tiny, Stoker's manager, doesn't tell Stoker about the setup. Tiny assumes that his tired slugger will lose anyway, and this stratagem lets him withhold Stoker's cut of the deal.

Once we know at the start that the fight is fixed, we can register greater tension in the relationship between Stoker and his

wife, Julie. His promise that he can win tonight seems naive to us, and her worries about his future gain new force, since we know he's been sold out by his backers. Committed to the fight, he offers Julie a ticket to the bout, but she doesn't show up. Instead, at intervals during the evening, the film cuts away to show her wandering around the neighborhood. These passages create some suspense about whether she'll stay with Stoker. When she goes to their room to heat up his supper, that concern is dispelled, but then we're allowed to wonder if he will return.

Another delaying tactic presents a spectrum of prizefighters. As Stoker waits in the dressing room for the main event, he's surrounded by men awaiting their preliminary bouts. One is an over-the-hill veteran, another is a scared kid, another is a confident young fighter. Positioned alongside the aging Stoker, the scenes sample a prototypical boxing career, from youth to decrepitude. To add emphasis to Stoker's match, we don't see these fighters' bouts. We hear the crowd offscreen, and the men come and go while we stay with Stoker and his trainers. In this way the film's tight duration is matched by a degree of spatial concentration. We don't enter the arena until Stoker comes in for his match, almost exactly halfway through the running time.

Thanks to the scenes with Julie, the conversations with other fighters, and Stoker's ignorance of the fix, the film's climax can arrive with force at about fifty-one minutes (in a seventy-two-minute film). That's when, after several rounds in the ring, the battered Stoker is told of the setup and urged not to cross Little Boy, the gangster behind the scenes. Because Stoker wants to prove to Julie that he is "just one punch away" from success, he stays on his feet long enough to KO his opponent. But in retribution Little Boy's thugs crush Stoker's hand. He won't punch again.

The Set-Up ends with Julie cradling the wounded Stoker in the street. He declares, as if speaking for all the fighters in these films, that he wouldn't throw the fight. "I won." The prize money will enable the couple to start a real life, so she can reply, "We both won tonight."

When RKO studio boss Howard Hughes saw *Champion*, he complained that a scene showing Midge beaten up by

gangsters was very similar to the climax of *The Set-Up*. He hinted that Robson, who had recently left the studio, might have learned of Wise's project. In the face of a lawsuit, some adjustments were made in *Champion*, but the fracas didn't stop Wise and Robson, former colleagues in RKO's Val Lewton unit, from forming their own independent production company.[2]

Hughes overreacted. The prizefight cycle of the late 1940s shows the sort of overlap among narrative conventions that we'd expect in any genre. The films display a rise-to-the-top plot, a criminal milieu, a moment when the fighter must choose to fight or fall, and the broader theme that the fight game can brutalize its participants and destroy their prospect of genuine happiness. Scenes of menacing thugs come with this territory.

The dynamic should be familiar by now. A schema, the straight-ahead thrust to the fighter's climactic bout, gets revised in various ways—through framing narration, flashbacks, replays, or "real time" treatment. Over just a few years, the creative community's eager search for novelty, under the pressure of rapid turnover, reshaped the fight genre's storytelling options.

Other filmmakers could refuse these revisions and return to more linear storytelling. But such a return could be inflected by other forties schemas. *Flesh and Fury* (1952), for example, gives us a deaf prizefighter who struggles to regain his hearing while punching his way to the top. The rehabilitation schema adapted from returning-veteran films is enhanced by a play with auditory subjectivity: a cacophonous sound montage renders the hero's confusion at a cocktail party, and fluctuating volume conveys his sporadically recovered hearing. Likewise, *Right Cross* (1950) becomes a social problem picture, using the fight game to highlight prejudice against Mexican Americans. Unlike *Crossfire* (1947), another film about racial prejudice, it doesn't complicate a "message" story with an audacious time structure. The film relies on chronology, omniscient narration, and a romantic triangle to convey the theme of ethnic brotherhood.

Linear though they are, *Flesh and Fury* and *Right Cross* show the period's continuing urge toward innovation. In this era, even a boxing ring could gain a voice.

CHAPTER 4

Slices, Strands, and Chunks

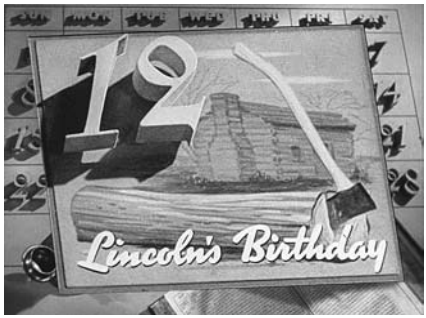
Went to the opening of *Tales of Manhattan*. . . . I asked Bob Hope how he liked the picture. "It was very episodic," he said enthusiastically.

Charles Brackett[1]

THE STRAIGHT-AHEAD, GOAL-DIRECTED PLOT, CONCENTRATING on one or two protagonists, was the most common way of organizing a studio feature, but it wasn't the only option on the menu. As we've seen, alternatives were available; the family drama and the combat film welcomed looser plotting and multiple protagonists. Other unusual tendencies emerged, again with some precedents in the 1930s.

One significant option involved weaving together lines of action within a single locale and a constrained time period. This option, fashionable in the wake of *Grand Hotel* (1932), was revived in the forties. Some filmmakers experimented further with confining story action, as we've already seen in *The Set-Up* (1949). A few went so far as to model their plots on stage drama, but just as many playwrights were moving in the other direction by opening up the stage in a "cinematic" manner.

Another option was to present the action in sharply articulated parts. The early years of sound had established the revue musical as just such a piecemeal genre. *The Hollywood Revue of*



4.1. *Holiday Inn* sets most of its action in a nightclub open only on American holidays.

1929 (1929), *The King of Jazz* (1930), and other films strung together musical numbers and comedy skits. Fairly soon, however, the numbers were blended into show-biz plotlines, however skimpy. This integrated model became the dominant format for musicals, although a few with revue elements, such as *This Is the Army* (1943) and *Hollywood Canteen* (1944), proved very popular.[2]

A more drastic way of breaking up the plot became salient outside the musical genre. A plot could be divided into distinct blocks, as when *Holiday Inn* (1942) uses calendar-based chapters (fig. 4.1). More drastically, each block could offer a different story and cast of characters. This "omnibus" or "portmanteau" format, very rare in the 1930s, became somewhat more common in the 1940s. The challenge for the filmmakers was to find an arresting way to bind the episodes together.

SLICES OF LIFE, BUT NEATLY WRAPPED

In the film *Grand Hotel* five characters, each given substantial emphasis, are brought together in a particular place and over a narrow time span. They pursue individual projects, but their interaction will reshape their destinies, and each one exits the situation changed. Maxim Gorky's play *The Lower Depth*s (1902), set in a homeless shelter and tracing the intermingling of several people down on their luck, provided a famous early prototype, and the model was most famously revived in Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (1946).

Grand Hotel probably helped filmmakers become conscious of

multiple-protagonist construction. But the storyteller has to find ways to interweave their goals and relationships. Then comes another choice: How complete should each line of action be?

One option is to offer, against the premises of the well-made play, a slice-of-life plot. Dramatists caught up in the Naturalist trend proposed that a plot should present a sampling of characters in a situation, without traditional exposition or resolution. The moment the dramatist takes a slice of life as material, Bernard Shaw noted, "he finds himself committed to plays that have no endings. The curtain no longer comes down on a hero slain or married."[3] The slice-of-life principle took a modernist turn in novels like James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Here, even if characters were gathered or linked, there was no guarantee of traditional expositions and denouements.[4]

Naturalist or modernist, the slice-of-life pattern could have undermined the linear, goal-oriented plot template. Hollywood, however, took the converging-fates plot in a more orderly direction. The Grand Hotel plot, as executed in Hollywood, tended not toward a mixture of fragmentary anecdotes but toward a suite of goals, crises, and climaxes of the type traced in standard plotting.[5] Once more we find a radical strategy adjusted to the continuity tradition: modernism moderated.

After Irving Thalberg bought the rights to Vicki Baum's novel and play, both called *Grand Hotel*, he predicted that "the swift-moving, episodic character of the play will probably serve as a pattern for many films." He was right on two counts. Several movies would take a hotel or similar gathering point as the source for a plot. More basically, the idea of converging fates would become a significant premise for story construction. "The general idea," as Thalberg put it, "will be that of drama induced by the chance meeting of a group of conflicting and interesting personalities."[6]

Thalberg's 1932 version of *Grand Hotel* wasn't the very first such item. The play *Street Scene* (1929) came to the screen in 1931. The action of both play and film takes place wholly on the stoop and sidewalk in front of a tenement, and it interweaves stories of romantic love, threatened families, and domestic unhappiness, culminating in eviction, murder, and escape. One could ar-

gue, however, that neither the stage version nor the film version weights all the characters equally. The central characters are Rose and her suitor Sam, whose lives are changed by the grim events of a couple of days. Moreover, like *City Block* (1922), a novel by Waldo Frank, this drama features people who know one another. Part of the mystique of *Grand Hotel* depends on strangers' meeting briefly and going their separate ways, permanently changed by accidental encounters.

There were other "hotel" plots at the period, such as Arnold Bennett's novel *Imperial Palace* (1930), which concentrates on the staff rather than the guests. But Baum's 1929 novel provided the most robust prototype. There, as in the play and film that followed, three men and two women come into contact across four days. Each character is permanently changed. A businessman ruins his life by killing a penniless aristocrat who has just become the lover of a fading ballerina staying at the hotel. Another woman, invited to become the businessman's mistress, turns away to console an older man suffering from an incurable disease.

Billed as the first "all-star picture," *Grand Hotel* became hugely successful, winning the Best Picture Academy Award and providing other films with a fresh plot schema. Later in the year came another MGM offering, *Skyscraper Souls* (1932). The film was ambitious, turning its single-protagonist source novel into a panorama of life in a modern office building. Limiting itself to that setting, *Skyscraper Souls* offers a larger cast of characters than *Grand Hotel* had, along with several romantic story lines and a stock-market crash that affects a range of individuals. *Life Begins* (1932) uses a maternity ward as a cross section of women's lives, while *Wonder Bar* (1934), adapted from another German play, traces a single evening in a nightclub. The constrained time scheme was highlighted in the multiple-story drama *Four Hours to Kill* (1935), set in the lobby and lounge areas of a theater. The format was parodied in the W. C. Fields vehicle *International House* (1933).

Baum recycled the premise of her most famous work in the novels *Hotel Shanghai '37* (1939) and *Hotel Berlin '43* (1944). But she deplored the fact that it generated "countless cheap imitations."[7] Her brand was constantly invoked in critics' shorthand descriptions. *Luxury Liner* (1933), with its dozen characters, was,

said one reviewer, "*Grand Hotel* on a steamboat," while *Captain Hates the Sea* (1934) was "*Grand Hotel* on a pleasure cruise." The catchphrase "*Grand Hotel* on wheels" was applied to *Streamline Express* (1935), set on a train; *Time Out for Romance* (1937), set in an automobile convoy; and most famously *Stagecoach* (1939).[8]

Baum's imitators understood that the Grand Hotel template offers many advantages. It can showcase a range of performers, although most of the 1930s entries featured not big stars but character actors. The format provides a sense of the "breadth of experience," a cross section of lives high and low, situations serious and comic. The schema also creates parallels among the characters' situations. It can smuggle in an unhappy ending for a story line, as with *Grand Hotel*'s ill-fated love affair between the baron and the ballerina. There's also an opportunity to display virtuosity in weaving together different lines of action.

Grand Hotel and its successors showed that a plot could evoke the slice-of-life approach without becoming episodic. Presenting varied individuals mixing with one another by chance, Grand Hotel plots give the impression of something freer and more realistic than traditional storytelling. In her novel, Baum tries to convince the reader that she has presented merely ephemeral bits. Reflecting on the revolving door at the hotel's lobby, the omniscient narration remarks:

> The revolving door twirls around and what passes between arrival and departure is nothing complete in itself. Perhaps there is no such thing as a completed destiny in the world, but only approximations, beginnings that come to no conclusion or conclusions that have no beginnings.

Yet Baum's plot is tidy, with each character's life coming to a climax—death, imprisonment, flight—over the span of action. Similarly, Hollywood's converging-fates plots pivot around crises and life-altering resolutions. The drama is indeed a slice, displaying a single milieu across a brief time span; but it's a choice cut.[9]

The scheme is seen at its simplest in *Club Havana* (1945). Six couples are spending an evening at the club. A woman who has left her husband is about to be abandoned by her lover; an eyewitness

to a murder is nearly bumped off by the killer; a young woman is on her first date with a doctor; a rich widow persuades a promoter to marry her for money; and so on. The sense of surveying different lives is largely maintained through crosscutting.[10] The only causal merging of lines comes when three couples converge: the dowager's sleeping pills enable the jilted divorcée's suicide attempt, which is staved off by the young doctor. In a running time of only an hour, the film develops its story threads minimally—no mounting obstacles or abrupt reversals—so that each couple's crisis gets resolved decisively in the course of the evening.[11]

The same coherence and closure are found in other 1940s variants of the Grand Hotel template. The title of *A Child Is Born* (1940), a remake of *Life Begins*, indicates how the maternity ward story lines resolve. It also makes the story lines more interdependent than those in *Club Havana*. *One Crowded Night*, the motel variant from 1940, ties together even more fates, and it wraps them up so neatly that critics objected to its "overcrowded" plot and "the long arm of coincidence."[12] *Busses Roar* (1942) puts its cast of passengers under ticking-clock suspense as their bus carries a bomb planted by German saboteurs. The passengers' individual dramas are subordinated to the deadline, but all are resolved in the end. Something similar happens in the hostage drama *Dial 1119* (1950). As a killer holds bar patrons at gunpoint, the strongest candidate for a protagonist gets killed early on, and each captive gets a chance to take distinct action.

A converging-fates plot need not be limited to a single locale. For example, we can be shown the characters leading separate lives before they gather in one place. This is the premise of Thornton Wilder's popular novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927). Wilder's novel starts at the moment of convergence, when several people are killed in a bridge collapse, then flashes back to reveal what brought them together. The 1944 adaptation followed the book's overall structure, although the film treats the flashbacks not in blocks but as insertions in a priest's investigation of what mystical forces assembled the victims.

Alternatively, the figure-eight structure of *Breakfast in Hollywood* (1946) centers on a radio show broadcasting from a restaurant. The main characters converge at the program, but before

that we're shown them en route, in parallel sequences. After the show is over, the plot follows them as they disperse. Everything wraps up when the characters reunite in the restaurant that night, with the radio host genially arranging a happy ending for all.

As in the 1930s, most of the 1940s Grand Hotel variants were B films, perhaps because the studios wanted their A productions to put their big stars front and center. Squeezing many contract players into a network film could compensate for the absence of top-flight talent. But two A pictures produced clear-cut switcheroos on the Grand Hotel prototype, and both had the authorization of Vicki Baum herself.

Hotel Berlin (1945) was adapted from Baum's 1944 novel. The major lines of action involve a partisan trying to escape the Nazis, a woman who is seeking her missing lover, and a German officer who, having failed in the plot to kill Hitler, must flee the country. Waiters, rival officers, a sympathetic drunken professor, and other ancillary characters connect up the lines of action, but the principal convergence comes at the climax. During a bombardment, all take refuge in the hotel's air raid shelter, and nearly every plotline is resolved. The exception shows Nazi officers escaping to Latin America to continue their skullduggery there—a clear warning, typical of war pictures, that the real-world fight isn't over.

The film that revived the Grand Hotel premise most explicitly was MGM's remake of the original, *Week-End at the Waldorf* (1945). The plot was updated to a home front setting and treated as a romantic comedy. The dancer (the Greta Garbo role) becomes a movie star (Ginger Rogers), and the down-at-the-heels baron (John Barrymore) becomes a foreign correspondent (Walter Pidgeon). Now the jewel theft plotted by the baron becomes a scheme developed by the maid's boyfriend. The crooked businessman (originally Wallace Beery) is now a war profiteer (Edward Arnold). The sour observations of a hotel habitué in the first version are replaced by kindly solicitation of a millionaire who invites a honeymooning couple to use his suite for the weekend.

The original *Grand Hotel* ran about 115 minutes, and this remake is only fifteen minutes longer, but it is far more crammed with incident. Scenes are shorter, the pace is quicker, and there are many more characters and lines of action. Like his predeces-

sor, the profiteer tries to seduce the hotel stenographer (Joan Crawford, now Lana Turner), but she is given a wholesome romance with a new character, a war-wounded soldier (Van Johnson) in town for a crucial operation. There's also a reporter investigating the tycoon. The plot throws in a third romance between the actress's doctor (who happens also to be treating the soldier) and his fiancée, who brings along her father and mother. Robert Benchley and his dog, Xavier Cugat and his girlfriend, and an Egyptian bey and his retinue are added to the mix. The plotlines are tightly interwoven, linked by overlapping goals, adjacent rooms, and even more phone calls than in the original. In a typical 1940s flourish, the Benchley character provides slightly obtuse voice-over narration.

The long format provides room to affirm brand identity. The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, in which all the action takes place, is publicized through extensive views of the facilities. As *Variety* noted, "The footage takes in everything from impeccable catering, telephonic and general service, to three-sheeting and the hostelry's private police force."[13] The hotel reportedly didn't charge for the use of its name and image.

Nor is MGM's own brand neglected. The cast features several of the studio's top stars and featured players. The correspondent is named Chip, so the actress doesn't miss her chance to say, "Goodbye, Mr. Chip." More pervasively, the film announces itself as a remake. Chip pretends to be a thief to get to know the actress, keeps calling himself the baron, and threatens to steal the grand duke's necklace. She gasps, "Why that's straight out of the picture *Grand Hotel*," and he replies. "That's right. I'm the baron, you're the ballerina, and we're off to see the wizard." The in-joke gets integrated with the plot when at the very end Chip looks at the cigarette lighter the actress has given him and Benchley's voice-over informs us, "The baron got his necklace after all." *Weekend at the Waldorf* gives us Grand Hotel redux with happy endings.

FOCUSED SPACE AND TIGHTLY WOUND TIME

The Grand Hotel template combines several principles that can emerge as plotting options on their own. It's likely that the 1932

film called attention to all of them and spurred filmmakers to disaggregate the original bundle. Some of the alternatives were more common (and innovative) in the 1940s than in earlier periods.

When Thalberg speaks of "drama induced by the chance meeting of a group of conflicting and interesting personalities," we today are likely to think of the network narratives in Robert Altman's *Nashville* (1975) and kindred films of the 1990s and 2000s.[14] Such plots need not be confined to a limited locale or brief time span, though they often are. Central to them is a reliance on several protagonists pursuing distinct projects that are connected in oblique ways.[15] By and large, far-flung network narratives aren't apparent in the 1940s. The only instance I know of is *Tales of Manhattan* (1942), which bases its network on a circulating object. I'll be considering it later in this chapter.

Other principles get more development at the time. Consider spatial confinement. The film version of *Grand Hotel* limits itself wholly to the hotel, as the play does but the novel does not. *Street Scene* had likewise stuck to one milieu, and other film adaptations during the 1930s, such as *The Petrified Forest* (1936), respected both the spatial and temporal constraints of the stage original. This rigor was unusual at a period when most adaptations "ventilated" a play by expanding the action into other locales, perhaps also spreading them across much wider time spans.

The emphasis on theatrical space and time is part of forties filmmakers' broader interest in finding new relations between films and plays. After the very talky movies of the early sound era, 1930s filmmakers became afraid of creating canned theater. André Bazin pointed out that some directors of the 1940s no longer felt that worry. They recognized that a film could respect theatrical space and yet exploit it cinematically. Jean Cocteau, in adapting his play *Les parents terribles* for his 1948 film

> maintains the essentially theatrical character of the play. Instead of trying like so many others to dissolve it in cinema, on the contrary he uses the resources of the camera to point up, to underline, to confirm the structure of the scenes and their psychological corollaries. . . . One is staging a play by means of cinema.[16]

Cocteau, along with Laurence Olivier in *Henry V* (1944) and *Hamlet* (1948), discovered that "it is not a matter of transferring to the screen the dramatic element—an element interchangeable between one art and another—of a theatrical work, but inversely the theatrical quality of the drama."[17]

A good example of enhancing a source's theatricality is *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1952). Elia Kazan initially planned to open up the play in the usual way, "making the play into a proper film by putting on screen everything that Blanche describes in dialogue about Belle Reve and her last days there." But after looking at the revised script, he felt that "the force of the play had come precisely from its compression, from the fact that Blanche was trapped in those small rooms." He went on to find a filmic means to accentuate the sense of enclosure. Freely moving walls allowed the set to grow smaller as the film progressed, becoming "more constricting and threatening."[18]

Other Hollywood filmmakers joined this self-conscious effort to "cinematize" theater. At one extreme sits *Rope* (1948), which almost maniacally respects the play's confinement to a parlor but transforms the action through camera movement and minutely graded shot scales. With its strict filming technique, it magnifies theatrical conventions while preserving them. Less flamboyant is *The Time of Your Life* (1948), which except for one scene on the beach adheres to the play's single saloon set. Likewise, *Guest in the House* (1944) opens up the play only a little and sticks mostly to the area in and around the family home. *Over 21* (1945), *Key Largo* (1948), and *The Glass Menagerie* (1950) seldom stray from the limited locale of their sources, while stressing, as Bazin had noticed, theatrical conventions through cinematic devices like group staging.

The site-specific film was not always a theatrical adaptation. *It All Came True* (1940) concentrates on a boardinghouse peopled by eccentric vaudevillians, while *Angels over Broadway* (1940) brings three characters together in a nightclub in the manner of *Club Havana*. Setting the action wholly on a train or a ship proved a useful device for suspense thrillers like *Sleepers West* (1941) and *The Narrow Margin* (1952). Again, it's Hitchcock who provides the most extreme example, in *Lifeboat* (1944),

which circumscribes its action more drastically than any other film of its era.

As we'd expect, several of these films not only constrain the locale but also abbreviate the time span. Many films of earlier years limit the plot to a few hours or days, but by the 1940s screenwriters realized the benefits of signaling the ticking clock from the start. Now entire suspense plots could be built around an overarching deadline, as in *Counter-Attack* (1945), *Behind Green Lights* (1946), *Deadline at Dawn* (1946), *Union Station* (1950), *Fourteen Hours* (1951), *Cause for Alarm!* (1951), and *The Steel Trap* (1952). In *On the Town* (1949) a digital readout reminds us that the three sailors have only twenty-four hours' leave in New York. *The Set-Up* and *High Noon* (1952) squeeze the film's time span even further by matching plot duration to screen time. *Rope* is probably the most cunning instance. The characters' interplay unfolds in "real time," as some critics noticed, but the background shift from afternoon to evening compresses several hours.[19]

Theatricalized time may be suggested more indirectly through long "stagy" scenes, each occupying a fairly unbroken stretch of time. *Home of the Brave* (1948), for example, breaks its action into big chunks corresponding to the play's acts, and these are largely played out in continuous duration. The film's theatricality is enhanced in that the Japanese snipers surrounding the soldiers are only heard "offstage" and never seen. *The Long Voyage Home* (1940) is based on four of Eugene O'Neill's sea plays, and each episode adheres fairly closely to the continuous duration of its one-act source. In all, a willingness to absorb theatrical conventions for presenting time and space allowed some 1940s filmmakers to refresh Hollywood storytelling options.

SQUARED TO THE SHARP EDGE: BLOCK CONSTRUCTION

From dual-protagonist films like *So Ends Our Night* to expansions of the Grand Hotel formula, from anecdotal plots like that of *The Human Comedy* to the theatricalized unity of *Rope* and the rigorous parallels of *The Best Years of Our Lives*, filmmakers elaborated plot schemas sketched in the 1930s. Most of these films are recognizable as developments of earlier trends, yet they are hard to

imagine in any era but the forties. Perhaps the most extreme revision of earlier schemas, and one that would have considerable life in the decades to come, involves a strategy that assimilated certain literary techniques.

In most narrative arts, an unfolding plot is split up into marked sections. For centuries plays have been broken into acts, and long tales have been chopped into chapters, strophes, or "books," as in the Bible or classic novels. Epistolary novels, as assemblages of letters, fell naturally into segments, as did fictions treating diary entries or embedded documents. Chaptering by chronological chunks is perhaps the most obvious way to segment a plot, but some novelists used chapters to mark more radical shifts. Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852–53) famously splits its text between a character-narrator speaking in the first person and past tense and a nonpersonified narrator using the third person and the present tense. The result is alternating blocks, two accounts of events that must be understood as complementary.

Henry James accepted chapter architecture as a technical challenge. By dividing *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) among three major characters, he noted, "There was the 'fun' . . . [of treating them as] sufficiently solid *blocks* of wrought material, squared to the sharp edge, as to have weight and mass and carrying power; to make for construction, that is, to conduce to effect and to provide for beauty."[20] Correspondingly, some of his novels have a geometric structure announced in the chapter divisions. *The Awkward Age* (1899), plotted as a series of "lamps" illuminating a central situation, titles its chapters "Lady Julia," "Little Aggie," "Mr. Longdon," and so on.[21]

Both the well-made novel and modernist fiction explored the aesthetics of sharp-edged sections. Joseph Hergesheimer's *Three Black Pennys* (1917) and *Java Head* (1919) divide their plots into long sections, each from a different character's point of view. Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) doesn't announce its underlying architecture in chapter titles, but each chapter changes its style and usually has a dominant motif, such as a color or a bodily organ. Faulkner split *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) into sections by date and narrator, while *As I Lay Dying* (1930) alternates sections narrated by different characters.

What I've called "mild modernism" in middlebrow fiction and drama took up the idea. Louis Bromfield's *Twenty-Four Hours* (1932) splinters the action into two dozen chapters, one per hour. In *Shadows at Noon* (1943) Martin Goldsmith posits a Nazi air raid on Manhattan and, across fifteen-minute intervals, intercuts blocks of action involving four men tangentially connected to one another. A play's three acts need not tally closely with time breaks (a curtain can interrupt an action that picks up in the next act), but Kaufman and Hart's reverse-chronology play *Merrily We Roll Along* (1934) breaks neatly into epochs, each scene moving to an earlier period than the one before.

Block construction came into new prominence in mystery fiction as well. The "casebook" genre that assembled testimony from various participants in a crime had been developed in Wilkie Collins's novels, and it was revived in Dorothy Sayers and Robert Eustace's *The Documents in the Case* (1930), Anita Boutell's *Death Has a Past* (1939), and Vera Caspary's *Laura* (1942). Percival Wilde's *Inquest* (1940) and *Design for Murder* (1941) combined the casebook convention with trial transcripts, the boundaries marked by shifts back and forth in time. Cornell Woolrich relied heavily on block construction for *The Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1945), with its intercutting between first- and third-person narration, and *The Bride Wore Black* (1940), whose chapters check off, man by man, the vengeful widow's hit list.

Such palpable divisions as these ran somewhat against Hollywood's aesthetic of narrative continuity. Once film theaters gained continuous projection in the silent era, there was no need for the break between reels, and major shifts of time or place might be marked only by fade-outs or a brief intertitle. The coming of sound favored even more seamless continuity of the sort that Gilbert Seldes and Otis Ferguson praised.

Block construction is more common in the 1940s than in the 1930s. Granted, musicals of both eras tend to break the film into distinct numbers. But a surprising number of comedies and dramas announce large-scale parts, sections that we are invited to notice, compare, and reflect on. Exposing the architecture of the movie, a fairly rare creative choice in earlier eras, can be seen as part of the forties wave of self-conscious artifice. An Orson

Welles or a Joseph L. Mankiewicz invites us to appreciate the virtuosity of balancing big sections against one another. In this milder form, block construction offers some important storytelling opportunities.

Most common are soft section breaks, as when dates or montage sequences announce different eras. Occasionally a film will introduce its story by opening a book. Initial pages of text may establish time and place, sometimes with a chapter heading included. Once we're into the story, however, the book as a framing device is likely to disappear until the very end.

There are firmer divisions into chapters, as we've seen with *Holiday Inn*. We get seasonal candy-box designs in *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944) and cartoon segment divisions in *Adam's Rib* (1949). The film version of *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1947) borrows its section titles ("Homecoming," "The Hunted," "The Haunted") from the original play cycle.

But few 1940s films use such thematic chaptering. In its absence, what cues can signal block construction? In the 1940s, a great many blocks are flashbacks, and the signals for these are well known. Take a situation in which a character recalls the past, track in on said character, add a dissolve or wavering image, ethereal music, and voice-over commentary, and we are ready to take what follows as a stretch of the past. The sense of distinct sections is increased when the flashbacks present varying points of view, as in trial and investigation films; *Citizen Kane* is the ambitious prototype.

A similar strategy, amped up by an initial crisis, rules *Three Secrets* (1950). Opening sequences show a plane crash that only a boy survives. To the rescue camp come three women, each thinking the boy may be the baby she gave up for adoption five years earlier. Woman by woman, we get three flashbacks of about twelve minutes apiece. As balanced units, the flashbacks dramatize ways women of different classes can become single mothers, with strong emphasis on how men have deceived them.

We can also be coaxed into considering the film as a set of blocks when we're confronted by more or less independent plotlines. *A Miracle Can Happen* (aka *On Our Merry Way*, 1948), sets three farcical stories within a frame showing a roving reporter

asking random citizens how a baby changed their lives. *Gangway for Tomorrow* (1943) assembles six people who car pool on their way to work in a defense plant. The genial driver invites them to his house, and as each one considers the invitation, recall-based flashbacks illustrate the events that led them to contribute to the war effort. Again, the blocks encourage us to create comparisons—here the many motives that can fuel patriotism.

Parallel lines of action can be drawn together more tightly by a strategy that was tried out in the 1930s. In *If I Had a Million* (1932) a dying plutocrat decides to hand out million-dollar checks to strangers. The bulk of the film presents a string of episodes in which different recipients react to their windfalls. At the end the plot returns to the millionaire, who miraculously recovers and decides to take up residence with a charming woman who received one of his checks.

This ripple-effect schema, in which strangers and their story lines connect through one triggering cause, can create neat plot geometry. In *We're Not Married* (1952), six couples must adjust to the revelation that a justice of the peace was not yet authorized to marry them. *Phone Call from a Stranger* (1952) centers on Trask, the survivor of a plane crash who visits the families of three people he met on board. In two instances he manages to give the relatives some comfort, and in the third a widow helps Trask solve his own marital problems. Flashbacks articulate parallel situations across the three families.[22] The parallelism is accentuated by the three phone calls Trask makes to the families, those in turn framed by two calls to his wife—one at the start when he announces he's leaving her, and one in the epilogue when they reconcile.

EPISODES AND OMNIBUSES

In *We're Not Married*, the parallel blocks take place more or less simultaneously after the triggering incident. *Phone Call from a Stranger* confronts us with selected flashbacks occurring in the past, leading up to the incident. What if we create blocks that unfold in 1-2-3 order, but without a protagonist or a present-time frame to link them? What can connect the episodes?

One option is a recurring object. The strategy was formulated

in the German film *Adventures of a Ten-Mark Note* (1928) and would become the basis of *Winchester '73* (1950). A locale can play this circulating role as well, as when a heritage house passes across generations in *Forever and a Day* (1943). That film's block construction was recognized; a critic called the film "a successful realization of the episodic *tour de force* in which a collection of anecdotes is hung gracefully on a single thread."[23] A neater instance of the circulating-object pattern, though, is *Tales of Manhattan* (1942).

A man's tailcoat slides down the social ladder as it passes from owner to owner. There's no framing situation; we simply begin with the suit delivered to a celebrated actor. A disgruntled garment cutter has cursed the coat and vowed it will bring bad luck to its owner. The curse seems confirmed: the actor, pursuing his mistress, is shot by her husband. His butler takes the coat to a friend, a butler for a playboy who's about to get married. In the coat the playboy's inquisitive fiancée finds a letter from another woman (the actress of the first episode). The playboy's friend tries to pretend the coat is actually his, but the woman falls in love with him and dumps her intended.

The tails are no longer needed for a wedding, so the two butlers sell the outfit to a pawnshop. From there it passes to an aspiring composer who will be conducting the premiere of his new piece. But the coat doesn't fit, and the seams rip while the composer is on the podium. Fortunately the maestro in charge chivalrously peels off his own coat, and the men in the audience do the same, granting the composer enough dignity to finish conducting the piece and accept the audience's applause.

The coat goes to a settlement house, where a minister and his wife repair it so a drunkard can attend the reunion of his law school class. He pretends to be the prosperous lawyer he once was, but he is embarrassed when a classmate's wallet goes missing. The protagonist refuses to show his wallet, deceptively fattened with scraps of paper. In a mock trial staged by his old rival, he confesses that he's become a derelict. In the end his old classmates are so impressed by his honesty that they offer him a job.

The tailcoat winds up in a secondhand shop and is stolen by two thugs who use it in their robbery of a casino. They escape by

plane, but the coat, containing the $50,000 they stole, tumbles out and falls into a community of black sharecroppers. The families treat it as God's gift and begin sharing out the money. The coat, now tattered beyond repair, winds up as a scarecrow outside an old man's cabin.

The fate of the coat depends on reversals. Initially bringing bad luck in each episode, it eventually benefits each owner. The actor learns that his mistress is treacherous, a new couple is formed when the wedding collapses, the burst seams earn the composer the audience's sympathy, the disgraced lawyer's visit to the reunion rehabilitates him, and the money in the coat gives the poor farmers a new life.

Tales of Manhattan provides an anthology of genres, from upper-class romantic intrigue and screwball comedy to sentimental drama and the rowdy spirituality of "all-Negro" films like *The Green Pastures* (1936) and *Cabin in the Sky* (1943). Motifs of performance, marriage, money, class relations, and group spirit run through the film; the closer we get to the grass roots, the more people aid each other. The final sequence among the sharecroppers enacts, with astonishing explicitness, the Marxist precept of "To each according to his need." The film ends with a rural community singing a hymn and kneeling in front of a scarecrow that recalls Jesus on the cross, swaying outside Old Christopher's cabin (figs. 4.2 and 4.3). It must be one of the most charmingly blasphemous shots in Hollywood cinema.

Another strategy for building an episode film is to set out freestanding stories that illustrate some larger theme. This form was sometimes called the omnibus film. Welles's unfinished documentary *It's All True* would have been an example.[24] A fictional instance is *Flesh and Fantasy* (1943) from Charles Boyer and director Julien Duvivier, the team who created *Tales of Manhattan*. The frame story finds Robert Benchley brooding in his club because a fortune-teller's prediction has triggered a bad dream.[25] His friend takes down a book of stories that discuss whether prophecies are reliable. In the first story, a woman about to commit suicide is given a chance to find romance. A mysterious old man gives her a mask of a beautiful face, which she uses to at-

4.2. *Tales of Manhattan* (1942): The sharecroppers celebrate their newfound wealth by singing "Glory Day" . . .

4.3. . . . to the crucified tailcoat that has brought them wealth.

tract a student. By the end of Mardi Gras, she has become beautiful under the mask.

The second story, based on Wilde's "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime," introduces a lawyer who, according to a fortune-teller, is destined to commit murder. Once the idea is planted, the lawyer considers giving way to the inevitable, but accidents prevent him from killing his targets. At the end he strangles the fortune-teller.

At the close of this episode, characters look down from a bridge at a circus setting up below. This location introduces the next tale, in which a tightrope walker meets a woman he has seen in a nightmare. The couple fall in love, but crimes in her past defer their ultimate happiness. The somewhat surprising fusing of the stories, which gives a chronological bent to the second and third tales, doesn't include a return to the bridge. Evidently the makers felt that the episode-film conventions sufficed to help viewers to grasp the third episode as a faintly marked block.

Back in the framing situation, Benchley concludes that he should forget about superstitions and simply master his fate. The sense that the otherworldly has been dispelled is signaled by the prologue and epilogue: a shot tracking past negative imagery of trees is echoed at the end by the same shot, but with the images printed in positive. Yet *Flesh and Fantasy*, true to its title, remains equivocal. No explanation is provided for the Mardi Gras stranger's magic, or for the fortune-teller's fatal prediction, or for

the presence of the woman in the acrobat's dream. Accordingly, Benchley's newfound confidence in daylight rationality seems shaky; on leaving the club, he avoids walking under a ladder. As with the later British episode film *Dead of Night* (1945), we're left in the realm of the fantastic, where neither firmly realistic nor wholly supernatural explanations will justify what we've seen.

Whatever the genre, filmmakers found that plots with self-contained episodes offered a useful economy within the format of the "all-star" movie. Actors could be contracted for a relatively short period, and the group assembled for one episode wouldn't have to be integrated with groups recruited for another, so scheduling was easier.[26] In addition, final adjustments were simpler. Episodes could be tightened or dropped, as happened with *Tales of Manhattan*.[27] One sequence shot for *Flesh and Fantasy* was excised and padded out to make a feature on its own, *Destiny* (1944).

There was a brief vogue for episode films based on short stories (*Quartet*, 1948; *O. Henry's Full House*, 1952). The episode film would become a more common mode in Europe, where coproduction agreements facilitated assembling short films made in different countries (*Les sept péchés capitaux*, 1962), and the format never quite vanished, as *Eros* (2004) and *Paris, je t'aime* (2006) indicate. It was exploited by Quentin Tarantino in *Four Rooms* (1995) and *Grindhouse* (2007).

Few forties episode films seem to have been big moneymakers, but Walt Disney was able to exploit block construction for financial advantage. *Pinocchio* (1940), *Dumbo* (1941), and *Bambi* (1942) hadn't yielded much profit, and Disney, sustained by contracts for government training films, encountered a tough employee strike. The firm needed to turn out low-cost theatrical releases.[28] *The Reluctant Dragon* (1941), *Song of the South* (1946), and *So Dear to My Heart* (1948) mixed animation with live action, which was cheaper to shoot. An alternative strategy was offered by block construction.

Disney came up with what he called "feature shorts," films that packed several self-contained cartoons into framing situations. Encouraged to make films friendly to South America, Disney produced *Saludos Amigos* (1943), a compilation of stories set within a travelogue showing Disney and his staff visiting Chile,

Argentina, Brazil, and Lake Titicaca. *The Three Caballeros* (1945) is organized around Donald Duck's birthday gifts, each of which leads to South American sequences hosted by two birds, José Carioca and Panchito Pistoles. The idea of the "feature short" can be traced back to the freestanding sequences of *Fantasia* (1940), which are presented as items on a classical concert program. Jiminy Cricket and Edgar Bergen introduce the two "featurettes" that make up *Fun and Fancy Free* (1948). Even sketchier are the frames around *Make Mine Music* (1946) and *Melody Time* (1948). Here the musical numbers, tagged with simple placards, match brief stories to varieties of pop music (ballad, novelty song, boogie-woogie, and so on).

Disney's post-*Fantasia* compilations commanded A-picture rentals but were cheaper to make than his more ambitious features. Pictorially, the episodes were more caricatural and less concerned with the expensive realism of rotoscoping and the multiplane camera. The studio's aim to illustrate music went back to the Silly Symphonies and other early sound cartoons, but many of the 1940s episodes, especially in *Three Caballeros*, pushed toward a zany humor and dazzling abstraction not seen in the studio's more prestigious work. The smaller budgets and the omnibus structure seem to have refreshed the artists' imaginations.

The plot formats I've surveyed didn't always emerge in pristine form; several films combine options that I've kept separate for the sake of analysis. The point is simply that classical construction yielded a tradition that could be modified in various ways. Schemas could be revised. There would be goals, but they might dissolve under the pressures of combat or the sheer dailiness of ordinary life. The role of protagonist might multiply, or it might dwindle to inconsequence. Instead of a single narrative line there might be several, converging in a single locale or packed as distinct tales within a frame. Crystallized in the 1940s, these plotting options would be further revised in the decades ahead.

INTERLUDE

Mankiewicz: Modularity and Polyphony

WHAT PRESTON STURGES WAS TO THE EARLY 1940S, JOSEPH L. Mankiewicz was to the decade's end: the preeminent "literary" writer-director. Both men favored plots with a satiric sting. Both professed a love for the theater and enjoyed stuffing scenes with dialogue. Both had begun as screenwriters in the early days of talkies and took pride in their ability to adjust to the demands of sound cinema. Both came out of screwball comedy, although Sturges added doses of slapstick while Mankiewicz sought a Wildean epigrammatic elegance. Both were happily film crazy, citing and mocking the Hollywood product. There was even a sense of a baton's being passed, with Sturges's last major film, *Unfaithfully Yours* of 1948, succeeded by Mankiewicz's breakthrough *A Letter to Three Wives* the following year.

Sturges's antic attitude, which let him slip in such gags as a poster for a nonexistent movie called *Chaos over Taos*, made him a risk for managing other people's projects.[1] The steadier Mankiewicz started as a writer but then became a producer, first at MGM. He moved to Fox during the Five Fat Years, after Zanuck had gone to war. "I was fortunate to get to Fox," Mankiewicz noted, "while Darryl Zanuck was liberating Africa."[2] His deal allowed him to produce, write, and direct. At first, though, it wasn't clear that as a director he would offer anything fresh.

In most respects he was conservative, swiftly turning out literate, high-gloss genre pictures: the domestic Gothic (*Dragonwyck*, 1946), the amnesiac man-on-the-run tale (*Somewhere in the Night*, 1946), the comfortably upholstered adaptation of a middlebrow best seller (*The Late George Apley*, 1947), the supernatural romance (*The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, 1947), the moralistic crime drama (*Escape*, 1948), a slum-family crime saga (*House of Strangers*, 1949), the social comment film (*No Way Out*, 1950), the Shavian drama of ideas (*People Will Talk*, 1951), and the spy story (*Five Fingers*, 1952). Studio chief Zanuck appreciated his talented writer-director but also saw him as a competitor, grumbling that critics didn't remember he always helped Mankiewicz shape the script and edit the final film.[3]

The fast-changing 1940s enabled Mankiewicz to discover his directorial talents. His peers competed to push the boundaries of flashbacks and voice-overs, to find new ways to deepen characterization and surprise the audience. But few could beat him on cultural cachet. Mankiewicz was the son of a literature professor; he finished high school at fourteen and graduated from Columbia a few years later. An English major, he never surrendered his love of fiction and drama. Footloose in Paris, he hung around Sylvia Beach's bookstore. On a vacation in Palm Springs, he preferred to sit in his hotel and read.[4] He said that he sought a "theatrical cinema," but when a French interviewer suggested his works were novelistic as well, he quickly agreed.[5] His love of long dialogue scenes was balanced by a concern for a large-scale architecture akin to the three parallel fantasies of Sturges's *Unfaithfully Yours.*

Committed to high art, deeply admiring Freud, sprinkling references to Shakespeare and Jonson across his films, Mankiewicz brought to his plots a playful self-consciousness that allied him with the mildly modernist side of popular literature. He collaborated on the episodic comedy *If I Had a Million* (1932), in which we watch the reactions of random people who receive a dying millionaire's gift. A decade later, when block construction became a more common narrative resource, he offered his own refinements in his two most famous films. *A Letter to Three Wives* and *All about Eve* (1950) shrewdly blended current narrative ingredients

to yield what Zanuck identified as the Mankiewicz flavor: "bitter comedy."[6]

HOW MANY WIVES?

The complex dramatic structures of Mankiewicz's official masterworks owed more than we might expect to popular fiction. John Klempner's 1946 novel *A Letter to Five Wives* provides multiple protagonists and a constantly shifting point of view. Women attending a meeting of their War Relief group receive a letter from their friend Adelaide Joss announcing that she has run off with one of their husbands. But she doesn't say which one. Klempner fills out the situation with a series of flashbacks in which each woman remembers episodes from her married life—a sort of slick-magazine version of the well-made novels of Joseph Hergesheimer and others.[7]

Zanuck bought Klempner's book on the strength of a synopsis and offered it to several members of his team, including Mankiewicz. Only producer Sol C. Siegel took it up, and he hired Vera Caspary to write a treatment. Siegel asked her to replace the women's meeting with a charity trip for children that brought all the wives together on a boat for a day's outing, thus making it impossible for them to phone and check up on their men. Using modular flashback narratives, Caspary drastically reshaped Klempner's novel,[8] cutting the number of wives to four and simplifying the structure. In place of the to-and-fro viewpoint shifts of the book, she gave each wife a single long flashback. This stabilized her plot around large-scale modules like those she had created in her novels *Laura* (1943) and *Stranger Than Truth* (1946).

Just as important, whereas Klempner had used third-person omniscient narration, Caspary's adaptation made Addie Ross, an old friend of all the husbands, the never seen voice-over narrator. (In the literary original, Addie is seen and heard only in the women's flashbacks.) Caspary also crafted a good deal of lively dialogue that remained in the final film, starting with Addie's memorable introduction: "All incidents and characters in this story are fictitious, and any resemblance to yourself or your neighbors is purely coincidental."[9]

Mankiewicz claimed that when he saw the Caspary adaptation he "looked upon the Promised Land" and quickly turned it into a screenplay. In "an almost bloodless operation," he obeyed Zanuck's request to eliminate one more couple.[10] The result fell into the line of trio-protagonist tales like *Three Strangers* (1946) and triple-flashback films like *Lydia* (1941) and *The Affairs of Susan* (1945). The screenplay and finished film elevated Mankiewicz to the top rank of directors.[11]

The film offers a triptych portraying upward mobility and social humiliation. Deborah, the farm girl who made good in the navy, has married the most prominent man in town, Brad Bishop. But her nervousness about attending her first country club soiree makes her drink too much, and she rips her already unfashionable dress. Rita, the striving radio scriptwriter, makes more money than her schoolteacher husband George. Her attempt to get him an editing job at the station fails when a dinner for her superiors ends in George's denouncing soap operas as intellectual pablum. Lora Mae, a gorgeous shopgirl, has been courted by her wealthy boss Porter, but he wants only sex. She successfully holds out for marriage, with the tacit understanding that it's a business proposition.

These comparisons snap into relief thanks to the parallel introspective flashbacks. After an introduction to the town, we see Deborah setting out for the children's day trip. When Brad tells her he has a business meeting that might keep him in the city overnight, her questioning him reveals her tense insecurity. Deborah drives off to pick up Rita, and while waiting she learns from George, attired in a nice blue suit, that he's off to a secret appointment. At the pier Rita and Deborah meet Lora Mae, and it's then, just before their ship casts off, that they get Addie's letter announcing she's leaving town with one of the husbands. But which one?

Starting the plot with Deborah makes her first among equals. While the two other women can fight for themselves, she earns our sympathy by her sense of inadequacy and the cruel accidents that befall her. Even though she will drop out of the film almost completely during the next two flashbacks, she can return vividly at the climax as the woman who has apparently been abandoned.[12]

Deborah's flashback, triggered by a little girl reading a story about a girl who was very poor, portrays a single humiliating night. She is being introduced to Brad's social circle at the country club dance. Without a proper dress, fearful of making a gaffe, drinking too much, Deborah displays an array of anxieties that mingle melodramatic pathos with social comedy. Her flashback also provides important exposition, letting us watch the interactions among suave Brad, Shakespeare-quoting George, and grumpy Porter. The couples' tensions emerge in edgy banter between Rita and George and insult-slinging between Lora Mae and Porter, who refuses to dance with his wife but is jealous when other men do.

Once the excursion group has arrived at the island, the film launches Rita's flashback. What could provoke George to leave her? The possible answer is another night of comic social humiliation. The broadcasting executives Rita has invited to dinner refuse alcohol, insist on listening to maudlin radio shows instead of coming to the table to eat, and carelessly break the phonograph record Addie has given George. Porter is there too, bored and oblivious, while Lora Mae interjects deflating wisecracks. When George, his patience pushed to the limit, bursts out with an attack on radio advertising, he dooms his chance for a job and triggers a quarrel with Rita that makes him storm out. On the day of the outing Rita mentions that she and George "aren't speaking again," so we have to infer that the disastrous dinner party entered a long line of martial disputes. Perhaps George is the one who ran off with Addie.

Back on the island, Rita finds Lora Mae in the locker room, where a dripping pipe cues the latter's flashback. The earlier flashbacks covered single nights, but Porter's wooing of Lora Mae unfolds over several months. Again, drama is mingled with comedy as Lora Mae gives Porter a glimpse of her leg and a passionate kiss, quickly cut off. A grim evening at Christmas seems to conclude their dating; Lora Mae leaves him brooding over Addie. But at New Year's he can no longer resist and bursts into Lora Mae's family cottage by the tracks to demand she marry him. Although the other couples don't appear in Lora Mae's flashback, one connecting thread is the sarcastic Sadie, who is Rita's cook and a pal to Lora Mae's mother. The flashbacks proceed down the

social scale, from newly rich wife to middle-class working mom to poor shopgirl, with Porter's proposal lifting Lora Mae to the uppermost reaches of society.

The plot plays the finale cunningly. Returning from the outing, Rita finds George waiting for her with an easy explanation of his absence (and the blue suit). After warm embraces, Rita calls her radio boss to say she'll no longer work weekends. Deborah, however, returns to find a note from Brad saying he'll not be back that night. The possibility that he's the defector is reinforced when Lora Mae comes home and Porter soon follows. But we should remember George's remark about one of Rita's secrets: "This is getting to be like a good mystery story where you think you've got the murderer picked out and it turns out to be somebody else."

A year before, Deborah was afraid to attend the country club ball, but now she goes alone. Everyone will infer that Brad has left her for Addie, but her willingness to see it through indicates that she has gained confidence and dignity. With the two and a half couples seated at their customary table, the twist comes: It was Porter who went off with Addie, but he came back. Designed to reassure Deborah, his admission functions as a grudging confession of love for Lora Mae. And though she now has grounds for a lucrative divorce, Lora Mae responds in her tough-girl mode that she doesn't listen to him when he's hitting the brandy bottle. After a kiss, Porter rises clumsily to dance with his wife. All three marriages are strengthened, and Addie's scheme is scotched.

Hollywood's classical four-part structure is delicately respected, with the climax arriving after three flashbacks. The extra attention to Deborah at both ends of the frame story counterbalances the longer flashbacks devoted to Rita and Lora Mae, each running about twenty-seven minutes. The parallel scenes at the country club (two dinners, a year apart) allow us to measure the changes in the characters and their relationships.

As in any mystery, the narration throws out hints that are readable in retrospect. Porter attracts less explicit suspicion than the other husbands do; Rita simply mentions seeing him at the train station. In the flashbacks, he seems less energetically committed to Addie than his buddies are, saying casually that he simply advised her on investments. But unlike the other men, he keeps

MMP.1. *A Letter to Three Wives* (1948): Porter gazes raptly at Addie's photograph.

MMP.2. After his return to Lora Mae, Porter broods, perhaps looking at the offscreen photograph. No other husband gets this lingering visual treatment.

a silver-framed picture of her. A slight asymmetry in the flashbacks, with Lora Mae's conclusion lacking a concrete transition back to her remembering situation, might also mark her relationship with Porter as a special case.[13] A stronger hint comes near the end, when the camera dwells on him (figs. MMP.1 and MMP.2).

THE POWER OF ADDIE ROSS

Throughout each episode, the pressure on the women is increased by their awareness of Addie as a rival. The three men and Rita socialize because, despite class differences, they were childhood friends. Addie was a part of their group until Brad came back from the war with Deborah. As a result of growing up with Addie, each man sees her as feminine perfection. George the intellectual declares that Addie has good taste, as she proves by sending him a recording of Brahms for his birthday. The department-store mogul Porter puts it another way: Addie has "class." And as Brad's first girlfriend, the cosmopolitan Addie makes Deborah wither in comparison.

We too are constantly reminded of Addie. Apart from her voice-over narration, she haunts the first country club episode, sending champagne over to the couples' table and chatting (back to us) with Brad on the terrace. In the opening scene, Deborah picks a fight with Brad because he has suggested she get a dress like the one Addie wore two weeks ago. (In the Deborah episode,

clothes become the mark of status; her navy uniform is, she says drunkenly, "the great levelleller.") Similarly, Rita has forgotten George's birthday, but Addie has remembered it. When Lora Mae visits Porter's mansion, she finds Addie's picture in a silver frame, and during the scene Porter broods over it as if mesmerized. Addie has the class that Lora Mae will never have. In all, it's plausible that any one of the husbands might run off with Addie.

She is the film's most powerful woman, and the others fall along a continuum behind her. Deborah has virtually no control over the complacent Brad. The working wife Rita, who had appealed to George when she was independent, acts as his equal. Only when she tries to remake his career does his snobbery become overbearing. Porter, for whom relationships are often reduced to dollars and cents, feels his power wane when Lora Mae, coming from literally the wrong side of the tracks, seduces him. Her refusal to become his mistress eventually brings him to his knees. But Lora Mae's reward isn't the adoration Addie elicits, only Porter's anger that she got the better of him in a deal. That Lora Mae and Porter, the film's most quarrelsome couple, actually do love each other is the plot's final revelation.

Klempner's novel had made the women rather petty and backbiting, but, perhaps thanks to Caspary, our three wives are strong friends. On the first meeting Rita consoles and helps the unhappy Deborah, and even Rita's teasing of Lora Mae—who does remain something of an outsider—gives way to affectionate byplay. Whatever their squabbles, the women are united in their suspicion of Addie, who not only represents a threat but reveals herself as no friend at all. On the scale formed by the easily cowed Deborah, the gently aggressive Rita, and the hard-boiled Lora Mae, Addie's sadistic manipulation pushes her off the chart.

Within the story world Addie Ross exercises her authority freely. In the flashbacks, she's constantly intruding on the couples—sending champagne to their table, giving George a birthday gift with a flirty card ("If music be the food of love, play on"), dining in the restaurant where Porter hopes to impress Lora Mae, hosting a party inviting Porter with or without a date, and most gratingly laughing with Brad at the country club after Deborah's humiliation.

As the narrator Addie is able to thrust herself into the film's moment-by-moment unfolding. Her voice-over makes her our guide to the town, and in the crucial opening section she picks out Deborah as her prime rival, since Brad had given Addie her first kiss. While Deborah and Rita drive to the pier, Addie slips comments into gaps in their conversation, as if she were watching the film along with us.[14] The three flashbacks begin not with each woman's question about her husband, but with Addie's teasing murmur. She has invaded each wife's consciousness. At the climax, when Deborah reads Brad's message telling her he'll be late, it's not his voice but Addie's that Deborah imagines; it's as if Addie dictated to him a message aimed at her rival.

Even in defeat, Addie launches one more incursion into the story world. In the last shot, Deborah's champagne glass tips over and cracks, as if Addie had been sitting invisibly at the table and now, abruptly rising to leave, displays her annoyance that her scheme has only reaffirmed the couples' commitments. "Heigh-ho, good night, everybody!" Caspary had proposed simply letting us hear Addie laughing, as if celebrating all the trouble she has caused. The film's tag, a Mankiewicz invention, lets our lady impresario retreat once and for all with a petulant shrug, a chess player acknowledging defeat by knocking over her king. While evoking the ghostly observers of so many 1940s films, the nonchalant artifice of Addie's farewell reminds us that *A Letter to Three Wives* is, however bitter at moments, a comedy.

FROM ADDIE TO ADDISON

Mankiewicz's breakthrough film as a director embraces the multiple-protagonist structure, with all three wives pursuing parallel goals in what they think is a zero-sum game. As often happens in such plots, one protagonist is highlighted. But his follow-up *All about Eve* offers a less clear-cut example. The finished film picks up several current trends in storytelling structure and pushes them into unexpected territory.

Again the source is slick-magazine fiction. Mary Orr's 1946 *Cosmopolitan* story "The Wisdom of Eve" was revised into a

twenty-five-minute radio play of the same title. Both utilize restricted viewpoint and embedded flashbacks. Eve's rise on Broadway is presented in first-person narration by Margo's friend Karen, who recalls episodes she witnesses or learns about. In both story and radio drama, we are almost completely confined to Karen's range of knowledge, and we're denied direct access to Eve's own thoughts and feelings.

In rough outline, the screenplay wound up close to the radio play.[15] It had obvious affinities with *A Letter to Three Wives* as well. Mankiewicz made Karen's account one of three that intertwine through the plot. As in *Letter*, we have a mystery teaser: How has Eve achieved stardom? Again the drama revolves around couples—Karen and Lloyd, Margo and Bill, Eve and Lloyd (briefly), and Eve and Addison (eventually and perpetually). The whole thing is overseen by a mordant, godlike character-narrator who can halt the story action for our scrutiny: Addie becomes Addison.

Still, there are fundamental differences. Start with the problem of the protagonist. Our three suburban wives are all having problems in their marriages, but happiness reigns among the star Margo, her fiancé and director Bill, and their friends playwright Lloyd and his wife Karen. Who's the heroine? The character with goals is Eve. But it would be odd to call Eve the protagonist. For one thing, she isn't observed with the intimacy accorded that role. Her scheme for crashing the theater world is revealed to us gradually, as others learn of it. Structurally she plays the role of antagonist, and her assault on the two couples' lives generates the plot. Unlike most Hollywood villains, she achieves nearly everything she tries for.

Addison says that we already know something about Eve, and for many 1950 viewers he's right. Studio publicity played up the prospect of watching a young woman ruthlessly connive at becoming a star. A photo spread in *Life* magazine surveyed her path to the top, even showing Phoebe, the fan introduced at the film's end, in a symmetrical layout with Eve and Margo.[16] Whereas critics were at pains to conceal the identity of the errant husband in *A Letter to Three Wives*, they had no compunction about giving away

the stages of Eve's triumph.[17] Moreover, although Anne Baxter had played many winsome roles, she made a strong impression in *Guest in the House* (1944) as a disturbed young woman who hides malice and lust under a mask of naive charm. One review noted that *Eve* "concerns a seemingly sweet young girl who soon turns out to be another guest in the house."[18]

Whether or not the viewer initially suspects Eve of treachery, the film announces at the outset that she has made it. The film begins at a banquet of the Sarah Siddons Society, and Eve is to receive an award for distinguished achievement. As usual in such plots, the question is less what she has done than how she did it. Once we see, in the first flashback, Karen introducing Eve to Margo and her entourage, we might expect a wholesome tale of a modest young woman who wants to act and, with the help of others, achieves stardom. But Eve presents herself as merely a fan, and then as merely someone to help at auditions by reading Margo's part, and after that as her understudy. She doesn't confess her burning ambition. This is less a story of talent blossoming than the story of a confidence trick.

One way the film obscures Eve's true motives is by filling scenes with the dazzling repartee of the other characters. *A Letter to Three Wives* has the propulsion of a well-wrought comedy-drama. Caspary's adaptation left room for Mankiewicz to expand George's tirades about the values of education and the bankruptcy of radio entertainment, but on the whole *Letter* moves briskly. *Eve* makes much more room for quarrels, asides, wisecracks, and monologues. Indeed, the film begins with a monologue, as Addison DeWitt's narration explains and mocks the awards ceremony before filling us in on the characters' backgrounds. Later we get Bill's encomium to entertainment, Eve's brief but rapturous appreciation of applause, and the epic slanging match between Margo and Lloyd when she learns that Eve has become her understudy.

These talkfests serve, in true Hollywood fashion, to show theater people as hyperbolic narcissists. In addition, many passages reveal how particular characters react to Eve's stealth campaign. At the plot level, the action is ironic. Eve proves herself a superb actress, at least off the stage; she bamboozles these pro-

fessionals with childish ease. Birdie, Margo's dresser and a tough vaudevillian, vaguely suspects that Eve is a phony, but only Addison, the cynical critic, sees through her performance, and admires it.

In the process of responding to Eve, the two other women are revealed as vulnerable. Margo needs a secretary, someone to regulate her disheveled lifestyle. But Eve's attention to Bill accentuates Margo's fear of growing old. Bill is actually the first to glimpse what's beneath Eve's mask when, after her triumph in substituting for Margo, she tries to seduce him. But that doesn't show him how deep her subterfuges run. Soon enough Karen and Margo will realize her full duplicity.

We sometimes say a storyteller has the option of making a plot that traces the changes in a character or one that gradually reveals a character's personality. Mankiewicz does both. Although Eve is eventually unmasked, exposing her true nature isn't the central task of the film. She's resolutely seen from the outside, she's accorded very little sympathy, and we never get an explanation for her driving ambition beyond her apparently sincere conviction that an audience's applause can supply love. The main business of the film is devoted to exposing the personalities of Margo, Karen, and Addison, with sidelights on Bill and Lloyd. And what the film traces is how both Margo and Karen change as a result of learning all about Eve.

Margo is the most flamboyant character, and her reactions prove the most entertaining. She struggles against Eve's influence on her friends, in the process confronting her own eventual decline. Once Addison has anointed Eve as the new young star, Margo leaves the arena. She accepts marriage and touring instead of starring in Lloyd's next play. Eve has made her realize that her love for Bill is more important than a new show.

Margo's retreat well before the end of the film shows that Karen has served as a thematic benchmark. Not a creator or performer herself, she comes from luxury and artistic cultivation. She married Lloyd when she was fresh out of Radcliffe, after he had been a visiting artist there. The suggestion is that as someone who was once carried away by the excitement of theater, she can identify with the starstruck Eve.

Eve divines that Karen is the weak point in Margo's circle. Calm, seldom participating in the badinage that surrounds her, Karen bridges the outsize world of the stage and the ordinary people looking in at it. Her in-between status makes her the perfect gull, and Eve lures her into ever more serious breaches of friendship. Out of sympathy Karen brings Eve into Margo's life. At Eve's request she persuades Lloyd to audition her. Then, after Margo explodes with wrath, Karen decides that the prima donna needs "a boot in the rear" and so keeps Margo away from a performance. In helping Eve make her debut, Karen doesn't realize that Eve has tipped off Addison, who in turn arranges for his fellow critics to be present. Karen can't imagine someone's being so calculating.

Karen's trick gives Eve leverage. She threatens to tell Margo how Karen engineered Eve's debut. Now Karen grasps the frightening extent of theatrical ambition. "A part in a play," she whispers. "You'd do all that, just for a part in a play." The stage world she found charmingly eccentric nourishes monsters. Only Margo's decision to withdraw from Lloyd's play spares Karen. But Eve's next step, seducing Lloyd, leaves Karen in a plight out of woman's-magazine fiction. "It seemed to me that I had known always it would happen, and here it was. . . . How could I compete? Everything Lloyd loved about me he'd gotten used to long ago." As in classic melodrama, the open-hearted and naive woman suffers the most.

Mankiewicz declines to give Karen the fate (divorce) that befalls her in Orr's story and radio play. Instead, he restores Lloyd to her by the expedient of having Addison claim Eve. For most of the film Addison has been a fanged, intermittent commentator, but his role in Eve's "accidental" triumph gives him control of her career, and then of her being. At the out-of-town tryout for Lloyd's play, he confronts her with his knowledge of her faked background. "You belong to me." The image of Eve crumpled on the bed, sobbing genuine tears, dissolves to her accepting the award at the Siddons Society banquet. The prize is her reward for surrendering to Addison.

INTERWOVEN VOICES

Mankiewicz could have recounted all these events more simply by framing everything within a single long flashback narrated by Addison. True, that flashback would have included events he didn't witness, but Hollywood flashbacks are seldom rigorously restricted. Yet to a rare extent Mankiewicz's two major films stick to each character's range of knowledge—carried not through optical point-of-view shots, as in Hitchcock, but simply through presenting events the character could have witnessed.[19] Caspary embraced that option in adapting *A Letter to Five Wives*, perhaps because she was used to fiction writing, and she knew that a subjective flashback in literature must adhere to the remembering character's range of knowledge. Restrictive narration also increases mystery, a goal of *Letter*'s overall plot.

The same tendency seems to have guided Mankiewicz in planning *All about Eve*. Instead of narrating one long flashback, Addison delegates the task to Karen by glancing over at her and letting her voice-over monologue muse on her first meeting Eve.[20] As in Orr's radio play, her voice-over is the one leading us into the past.[21] Originally Mankiewicz had planned to steer us carefully between past and present. After Addison introduces the award ceremony, we get Karen's initial flashback. Then Mankiewicz's screenplay comes back to the Siddons banquet and passes the narration to Margo, with her voice-over leading to another flashback. When her flashback stretch ends, the screenplay brings Margo back to the banquet. She glances over at Karen, whose inner monologue picks up the story. Following the rule of three (Karen—Margo—Karen), the screenplay then no longer returns to the banquet. For the rest of the film, the voice-overs waft in as needed, but the image remains firmly in the past.

Zanuck let Mankiewicz shoot the full screenplay, but he insisted the three-hour result be cut down. All the early returns to the banquet were eliminated, so that after Karen's initial musings, the film doesn't revisit the ceremony until near the finish. Zanuck evidently realized that anchoring the flashbacks again was unnecessary, and that the return to the present would be

more powerful if saved for the end. But the voice-overs were retained, creating a sort of floating commentary as characters chime in.

This polyphonic treatment can be seen as an inadvertent innovation, like the looped structure we'll encounter in Sturges's *The Great Moment* (1944). And it's true that different voices dipping in and out of one long presentation of the past is unusual. Still, it's an easily accepted revision of a tactic we've seen emerging in the era. Radio drama had accustomed listeners to narrators who invoke a scene and vanish, to be replaced by a different storyteller. And many 1940s filmmakers realized that however carefully you needed to signal a move *into* the past, the transition out of it could be treated quite flexibly. Framing situations could be fiddled, as in *The Killers* and *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye*, or dropped altogether, as in *Guest in the House*.

Such fluid commentaries permit more concise storytelling, as when Karen explains her trick on Margo and Addison informs us of Eve's triumph. Doubtless Mankiewicz also wanted them to have psychological resonance. In particular, our sympathy for Karen intensifies when she confides to us her feelings about losing Lloyd to Eve. Margo largely drops out of the plot during the last twenty-five minutes, with the slack taken up by Karen's self-recrimination and Addison's claiming Eve as his creature.

Zanuck trimmed other scenes besides the banquet ones, but the cut Mankiewicz most resented involved a replay of Eve's staircase monologue. While Addison, Bill, Karen, and others are sitting on the stairs, Eve speaks ecstatically of "waves of love coming over the footlights and wrapping you up." Mankiewicz originally presented the monologue first in a flashback narrated by Karen and again in one narrated by Margo (introduced by a return to her at the Siddons banquet).

In 1940s films, a replayed scene usually served to fill in suppressed plot information, as in the repeated murder scene of *Mildred Pierce* (1945). But Mankiewicz planned his to reveal character, with the first version favoring Karen's sympathetic response to Eve and the second emphasizing Margo's growing dislike of her. Once Zanuck had eliminated the framing transitions to the banquet, however, retaining the replay would have been not only

redundant but confusing. To smooth everything out, a voice-over from Karen was excised and some scenes were rearranged. Traces of the changes remain in some mismatched cuts.[22] For decades Mankiewicz would complain about losing the second go-through.

As a result of the polyphonic voice-overs and restricted flashbacks, Eve is kept at a distance throughout the bulk of the movie. We get a few privileged glimpses of her, notably in a moment when another woman in her rooming house is shown phoning Lloyd with Eve's message before coyly going upstairs arm in arm with Eve. (Mankiewicz doesn't shrink from hinting at Eve's ambivalent erotic tastes.) After our return to the awards ceremony, we take leave of Margo's entourage and follow Eve and Addison to her hotel.

There, for the first time, we see her alone, but only for a few moments. No psychological probing follows; she simply behaves a bit abrasively to Phoebe, a high-school fan who has sneaked in to get her autograph. Soon Phoebe is acting as Eve's servant. Addison stops by to return the Siddons award and immediately spots Phoebe as an Eve-in-waiting. While Eve relaxes, Phoebe practices bowing in front of a three-sided mirror, clutching the award as Eve had held Margo's dress before a similar mirror. The artificiality of Phoebe's multiplied reflection also recalls the image of success that was burned into the film during the freeze-frame of Eve accepting the Siddons trophy. In all, a scene starting with a detached view of Eve turns into a private moment showing the woman who wants to take her place.

This epilogue breaks with the broader pattern of the film's narration. Addison starts as our *raisonneur*, one with the power to halt the moment of Eve's getting her award. He creates a pause during which the past can be revisited. His voice-over has already introduced us to Karen and Margo, and with a flick of his glance, he passes the narrating task to them. He addresses us directly, instructing us what to notice and what to ignore, but the women aren't so self-conscious, plunging instead into purely private recollections. Addison's voice-over resumes during the scene when he assumes control of Eve's career. At that point his mastery of the telling is matched by his domination of the action told.

Still, in the final sequence in Eve's suite, Addison is no more privileged in his access to Eve than Karen and Margo have been. The vision of Phoebe as an endlessly mirrored ingenue is for us alone. As usual, even an unusually powerful story-world narrator will be swallowed up by the even more powerful narration of the film as a whole. In the 1940s, that process of narration became remarkably varied, generating both coherent innovations and fractured forms.

In the years that followed, Mankiewicz's creative horizons were defined by the storytelling possibilities opened in the era when he began directing. *The Barefoot Contessa* (1954) revisits the polyphonic flashbacks and voice-overs of *All about Eve*. This time, as his own producer, he managed to include a scene that is played twice in two flashbacks. *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1960), a return to the Crazy Lady figure of the 1940s, culminates in a talking-cure scene that replays a traumatic moment across eleven minutes. *The Honey Pot* (1967), at once a pastiche of *Volpone* and an elaborate murder thriller, ends with two dead characters discussing the action in voice-over.[23] In the original script, characters not yet introduced were to be heard commenting on the story so far, while censorship papers and other documents were to be spliced in too.[24] *Hellzapoppin'* for intellectuals, perhaps.

Late in his career, Mankiewicz was at work on a feature film derived from Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet novels. He described the project as "four different stories about the same woman . . . and all of them are wrong." The four narrators would all be present for every scene, so the perspective shifting of *All about Eve* would get multiplied. His six-hundred page screenplay, he told his interviewer, "had licked the problem of the space-time continuum."[25] Was he kidding? Or was he simply confessing some outsize ambitions that had been awakened at a time when he and his peers strained to tell stories in daring ways?

CHAPTER 5

What They Didn't Know Was

The whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the question of the point of view.

Percy Lubbock[1]

EVERY NARRATIVE PRESENTS A FLOW OF INFORMATION ABOUT the ongoing action. But typically that information is distributed unequally. What economists call information asymmetry is central to storytelling in all media. Some characters know more, some know less.

Joseph Mankiewicz recalled that a seasoned screenwriter introduced him to the rule of "what they didn't know was."[2] When an heiress mistakes a grand duke for a chauffeur, you have the germ of a story. A great many Hollywood plots are premised on secrets, deception, misunderstandings, and mistaken identities. In *Five Graves to Cairo* (1943) Rommel's staff must be kept unaware of Bramble's masquerade, while in *The Set-Up* (1949) Stoker is unaware that he's been sold out by his manager. *All about Eve* (1950) depends on the characters' not knowing what Eve is up to.

The viewer monitors this flow of information, or misinformation. We may know from the start that the chauffeur is a grand duke, so we can enjoy the heiress's disdain. Or we may learn the truth when she does and be just as surprised. The revelation of

Nancy's kleptomania in *The Locket* (1946) is concealed until she confesses it. The "they" in "what they didn't know was" can include us.

Manipulating information can do more than create plot reversals; it can reveal character and make a social point. Take *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947). A 1930s film might have told us Philip's reporting assignment—to plumb casual anti-Semitism—when he's first briefed by his editor. Instead the scene fades out as his editor begins to explain his idea. Only when Philip later tells his son and mother do we learn his assignment, so we get both his exposition and their reaction at the same time.

Philip then conceives his angle, his "dramatic device" of pretending to be Jewish himself. We're let in on his plan from the start, but his colleagues and friends aren't. Knowing more than most of the characters permits us to examine each one's response to Philip's imposture. These responses include varying reactions from Jews as well as gentiles, so a spectrum of social coping strategies emerges. Crucially, Philip leads Kathy, the socialite who loves him, to think he's Jewish, and this allows us to watch for signs that she's hiding her own prejudice. Following Hollywood tradition, the romance plotline becomes interwoven with the social critique one.

Mankiewicz's informant frankly exposed a major storytelling strategy, but he wasn't the only one sharing tradecraft. Filmmakers of the 1940s often discussed ways information could be manipulated. Hitchcock's celebrated distinction between suspense and surprise became widely known and parroted; advisory articles in the *Screen Writer* and the *Writer* were devoted to setting up a film's hierarchy of knowledge.[3] The rise of the suspense thriller led to explorations of methods of mystery and obfuscation.

Perhaps because forties screenwriters were more aware of these options, one screenplay manual was unusually explicit about them. Eugene Vale's 1944 book *The Technique of Screenplay Writing* echoed Mankiewicz's mentor in stressing the role of misunderstanding, while linking it to the *quiproquo* of ancient comedy. Vale went on to itemize the ways story information could be shared, split up, or concealed. He inventoried the possibilities provided by secrets, enigmas, and misleading exposition and

concluded, reasonably enough, that "the selection of information can make the story more interesting than it actually is."[4]

So plot structure and the roles played by goals, parallels, protagonists, scenic blocks, and the like form only part of the story of storytelling innovation in the 1940s. We need to understand as well the fresh, sometimes peculiar methods of cinematic narration that emerged.

OMNISCIENT VIEWS AND ATTACHMENT ANXIETIES

Cinematic narration, using images and sounds to regulate the flow of information, typically involves concentrating on the doings of various characters. Go back to *Cover Girl* (1944). Some scenes attach us to Rusty and Danny, some to only one of them. At points we're privy to the plans of the publisher Coudair and his allies; at other moments we're alone with the sidekick Genius. Importantly, we see and hear everything we need to understand the overall action moment by moment. Even scenes centered on a character, such as Rusty's visit to *Vanity* magazine for an audition, exceed that character's knowledge by showing events she doesn't witness. Characters have secrets from each other, but in *Cover Girl* the narration shares everything with us. Here our range of knowledge, to adopt a term from literary study, is omniscient.[5]

Classical cinema has long treated omniscient narration as its default value. When in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) Griffith crosscuts between the threatened Elsie Stoneman and the Ku Klux Klan riding to rescue her, we're granted a godlike range of knowledge. We know, as she doesn't, that she may be saved. Closer to the period we're considering, we have an even more far-seeing narration incarnated in *Our Town*'s Stage Manager, who can tell us when and how a character will eventually die.

By contrast, the opening scenes of *Five Graves to Cairo* limit our knowledge quite a bit. John Bramble staggers across the desert to hide in the hotel. The narration might have intercut his trek with action at the hotel, introducing us to Mouche and the hotelkeeper before he encounters them, but the film instead attaches us to him, building uncertainty about his fate. Throughout much of the action that follows, we're attached to Bramble.

The narration in these stretches can be said to be comparatively restricted.

Few Hollywood films of any era are restricted to a single character's range of knowledge throughout. For *The Big Sleep* (1946), director Howard Hawks supposedly told Humphrey Bogart: "Bogie, this is all told from your viewpoint. No scene starts until you come in."[6] The film, like *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and other detective tales, is indeed very restricted, although occasionally the perspective widens a little.[7] Classical cinema seldom replicates the severity of the first-person viewpoint available to fiction, though in the 1940s a few films did try.

Tight restriction and broad omniscience are polar extremes, with many narrational strategies in between. We've seen that several films that don't restrict us to a single character do limit the action in time and space. *Grand Hotel* (1932), *Angels over Broadway* (1940), *Club Havana* (1945), and other films choose to concentrate story information within a single locale and a short time span. Somewhat broader restriction is possible too. *The Human Comedy* (1943) gives us glimpses of Homer's brother in the army, but *Since You Went Away* (1944) confines us to the family's activities on the home front. We follow the three women through their lives, and we never stray beyond their ken. As a result, part of the drama creates an uncertainty about the fate of the father we never see. This option is carried to a kind of limit when a central character is kept permanently offscreen, like the son in *Edward, My Son* (1949) and the husbands in *The Women* (1939).

These narrational patterns operate in both large compass and fine grain. Many films of the 1920s relied on crosscutting throughout many scenes, so we are constantly shuttling among characters. This degree of omniscience became rare in the sound era. Most commonly, one or more scenes would be restricted to a single character before we get reattached to another one. Early sequences of *Twelve O'Clock High* (1950) carry us along the chain of military command from one officer to another before arriving at the general. Such moving-spotlight narration can create a feeling of omniscience, but it can also be used to withhold information from us.

Lying somewhere between omniscience and rapid moving-

spotlight restriction is the multiple-perspective strategy. This pattern tends to emphasize different characters' responses to a central situation. Often entire episodes are severely restricted to one character's range of knowledge. It's perhaps most common when a string of flashbacks concentrates on one character after another, as in trial testimony, but *Citizen Kane* (1941), *Lydia* (1941), and other films exported the template beyond crime fiction. *The Affairs of Susan* and *The Locket* deploy this technique. Other block-constructed films like *Tales of Manhattan* (1942), *Gangway for Tomorrow* (1943), and *Three Secrets* (1950) shift from one highly restricted episode to another, as Mankiewicz does in *A Letter to Three Wives* and *All about Eve*.

We often don't appreciate how subtly patterns of restriction and omniscience can fluctuate, but 1940s filmmakers, more than their predecessors, were willing to regulate knowledge moment by moment. A good example is the menu available for rendering phone conversations.

The basic options are apparent. We can see both parties in alternation, as they speak and react to one another (omniscience). Or we can stay attached to one but hear the other one (restriction). Sometimes, however, we get less information than the character does. In *Shadow on the Wall* (1950), a murderess calls a hospital to ask if a child's testimony can hold up in court. The scene is restricted to her, and at first we don't even hear the response of the person she has called. Only when the man on the other end of the line explains that a child can testify do we hear his voice. The narration has suppressed the banal opening exchange of the conversation in order to stress the key piece of information.

The long final scene of *Humoresque* (1947) makes powerful use of this suppression of information in a phone call. Crosscutting makes us visually omniscient, but the sound is highly restricted—again, suppressing what a character hears. Helen Wright calls her lover, violinist Paul Boray, from her beach house. Weeping and shaky, she explains that she can't face coming to his concert. The conversation is split: in shots of Paul on the phone, we hear his lines but not her replies. In Helen's shots, we don't hear Paul.

His abrasive questioning at the start dominates the scene, but then the narration attaches us to her as she explains why she has

retreated to the solitude and calm of the beach house. We can study her state of mind undistracted by Paul's angry questions. By forcing us to attend steadily to her reactions without hearing what provokes them, we can infer Paul's distracted self-regard. Although we don't hear what he says, the narration violates verisimilitude by letting us hear a click when he hangs up—a simple sound effect that cruelly cuts off Helen's monologue. Soon Helen will walk into the sea.[8]

All these patterns of omniscience and restriction, large-scale or moment by moment, can be devoted as much to characterization as to plot development. Multiple-protagonist films benefit from the expanding contrasts among the major personalities of the action. Thanks to shifts of narrative focus, the three returning vets in *The Best Years of Our Lives* get more differentiated as the film goes on.

Something more sharply patterned happens with shifting attachment during *In a Lonely Place* (1950). Here the restrictiveness of a mystery plot is used not only to heighten suspense but also to probe the mind of a dangerous man.

In a Lonely Place first attaches us to Dixon Steele, a screenwriter on the skids. He's introduced trying to pick a fight with another motorist, then starting a brawl in a restaurant. The hat-check girl he invites home with him, purportedly to summarize the book he has to adapt, is murdered shortly after she leaves. Her boyfriend is under suspicion, but Dix's well-known belligerence makes him a plausible suspect. He has, however, a partial alibi furnished by his neighbor Laurel Gray. Eventually they become lovers, and she pampers and stabilizes him enough that he can work on a new script.

About halfway through the film, Laurel is summoned to police headquarters to be told Dix's history of violence. We knew nothing of his numerous attacks on women. Our attachment soon shifts to her when she witnesses Dix's angry outbursts. When Laurel sees him nearly kill a young man who has challenged him on the highway, she begins to realize she's in jeopardy.

Laurel plans to flee to New York, but she dare not tell Dix, who's busy planning their wedding. When her escape plan is revealed, Dix explodes. By the time the police establish Dix's inno-

5.1. *In a Lonely Place* (1950): Dix becomes excited by his imaginary reconstruction of the crime, mimicking the act of strangulation.

5.2. As he tells Brub to squeeze Sylvia's throat . . .

5.3. . . . Dix leans forward into an ominous flare of light.

cence in the hatcheck girl's murder, he has nearly killed Laurel in one of his rages. As he suddenly realizes the extent of his mad aggression, he leaves her. The last shot, from her optical vantage point, shows him withdrawing into solitude and hopeless anger.

The novel *In a Lonely Place* is largely restricted to Dix, who is in fact the killer. But the film, constructed on principles of Hollywood dramaturgy, couldn't stay attached to a guilt-free Dix and have much of a plot, since he is coasting; he has no goal because he rejects every writing assignment he's offered. The first third of the film adheres largely to his range of knowledge, and arguably the restaurant brawl puts us on Dix's side because he's defending an old, harmless friend against a bully. But we get weaned away from Dix. First we see him coaxing his friend, the cop Brub Nicolai, to replay the strangulation, with Brub's wife as victim (figs. 5.1–5.3). The film has gone about as far as it could in revealing the mix of Dix's artistic creativity—"I've killed dozens of peo-

ple, in pictures"—and his need to hurt others. He isn't the serial killer, but he might have been.

The decisive action begins with Laurel, who tries to pull Dix back to civilized behavior. The narration, by attaching itself to Laurel and using her reactions to cue us, shows the humorous and generous man Dix might be. But our attachment also makes us share her shock and fear when he goes off the rails. With Dix observed first by the police, then by Brub and his wife, and most sympathetically by Laurel, *In a Lonely Place* becomes a study of a talented brute whose frustrations place him beyond redemption.

STRATEGIES OF SUPPRESSION

It's not unfair to leave things out.

Agatha Christie[9]

Cinematic narration aims to give us more than it hides, but usually something crucial remains concealed. Take *And Then There Were None* (1944), René Clair's clever adaptation of an Agatha Christie novel and play. The film strews its narration with red herrings. Guests summoned to a lonely island die one by one, enacting the nursery song "Ten Little Indians." In one scene, some emphatic cut-ins to one character hint that he's the murderer, but later he'll be killed along with the others.

Later, thanks to a flashback and a replay of the discovery of a certain body, we'll learn that one scene was cut off a bit too soon. Had it continued, we would have known everything. But that sort of omission seems, as Mrs. Christie says, not unfair. After all, the playful artifice of the piece is established early: characters abruptly address the audience, and suspicious guests queue up to peek through keyholes. As when we read a whodunit, we should be on our guard for sleight of hand.

Omissions, of course, are central to mystery plots, and filmmakers have long relied on them. But every genre may exploit suppressed information. In the war film *Counter-Attack* (1945), a group of Baltic partisans is assigned to attack German headquarters. They seize the building, but as they do so the entire area is caught up in a tank battle. In a gesture respecting the original

play's staging, we are confined to the cellar where Alexei and Lisa hold Nazi officers at gunpoint.

A mystery arises about which of the officers is the commander, and the ensuing cat-and-mouse game drives a good deal of the film's suspense. The battle rages on above them, but Lisa and Alexei cannot know whether German or Russian tanks are controlling the terrain. Neither can we: the cutaways to the battle don't indicate who's winning. The Nazi prisoners seize on this uncertainty to promise they will soon be rescued. They seem vindicated at the climax, when we glimpse German soldiers digging into the cellar. But when the cellar is opened up, the narration reveals that the victorious Russians have used captured Germans to do the hard work.

Most often, the crucial information is hidden within ellipses, those bits of story time that are skipped over by the narration. As Clair's prematurely trimmed scene shows, managing ellipses is a major task of cinematic narration. More broadly, suppressing information of any sort, such as the offscreen progress of the battle in *Counter-Attack*, is crucial to arousing and sustaining viewers' interest. In all, 1940s Hollywood found creative ways to make the act of leaving things out smooth, efficient, and sometimes deeply misleading.

Consider ellipses first. The default option is simply to skip periods that are inconsequential, such as the time taken by a trip from one spot to another or the transition from night to morning. We presume that nothing of narrative significance has happened in the interval. What does occur can be summed up in a montage of newspaper headlines, travel, or the like. These sequences typically present reliable information.

Or the filmmaker may explicitly signal that something important has been omitted. In *The Woman in White* (1948), the mysterious Ann encounters Hartright and says, "Let me tell you, sir, exactly what it is I know. Then I'll go with you." Dissolve to them arriving at the house; we will learn her tale only later. A crucial scene in *Spellbound* (1945) raises the question whether the neurotic protagonist has killed the kindly doctor who has taken him in. The question remains unanswered until the next morning, when we see the doctor alive and hearty.

Horror films developed conventions of gradually revealing key moments, such as the transformation of a human into some supernatural creature. In *The Wolf Man* (1941), the first metamorphosis of a minor character into a werewolf is wholly elided; then when the hero becomes corrupted we see how he turns into the creature. *Cat People* (1943) is notably trickier, because Irena's passage from woman to leopard is never shown. In the earliest scene, we merely hear the leopard's growl; the next transformation shows only the cat's shadow; and only at the climax do we see the leopard. At no point do we ever witness Irena's shape-shifting.

Still, these ellipses play fair; we recognize that something important is being omitted. Sneakier are unmarked ellipses, moments when crucial events are skipped over and we're *not* told that something is missing. Shifting narrational attachment can make concealment seem natural.

To take a minimal instance, *The Trial of Mary Dugan* (1941) initially attaches us to Mary. After a rocky childhood and a suspicious past, she finds a job as secretary to a suave attorney. Because she's reluctant to reveal her past, she breaks off with her boyfriend Jimmie and allows him to take a job in Chile. After a year the focus shifts to Jimmie. He returns to find that Mary is on trial for murdering the attorney. Through Jimmie, we are filled in on the circumstances, and we follow him to court to watch the case play out. Testimony supplies not only backstory on the crime but information about Mary's childhood that we hadn't previously known. Jimmie becomes Mary's lawyer, and in a lengthy courtroom sequence he brings out evidence that proves her innocent. He has conducted an investigation, but for the sake of maintaining suspense and surprise, that too has been elided.

In a case like this, we might say, the restrictiveness of narration is even more severe than usual: despite our attachment to a character, we know less than he does. A simple cutaway can give a character an unacknowledged secret. Mark Dixon, the detective in *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1950), has killed a suspect in self-defense. Rather than admitting it, he decides to cover up the crime. Dixon leaves the apartment pretending to be the victim and takes a cab back to the train station.

But we don't see the entirety of Dixon's coverup. After he calls

5.4. *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1950): Filling a gap in our knowledge.

the taxi, the narration cuts away to show the cab driver arriving outside. We wouldn't normally notice this break, but when Dixon revisits the apartment in the next scene, he finds his partner already there searching for clues. Dixon casually walks over to a closet and opens the door, revealing—to us, not to the partner—the victim's body inside (fig. 5.4). Apart from adding suspense (Will the partner check the closet?), it prepares for the next phase of the action, in which Dixon has to dispose of the corpse.

An extreme case of suppression via the moving spotlight takes place in *Random Harvest* (1942). In 1917 a wounded war veteran can't recall his past life. He gains the name Smitty when he's taken in by Paula, a young woman who falls in love with him. Eventually they marry, but while on a trip alone he is struck by a car. Thanks to the convenient vicissitudes of amnesia, the accident restores his memory of his earlier life but wipes out his memory of the past three years. We stay attached to him as he returns to his family home and prospers in business. We don't find out what happens to Paula—until she suddenly walks into his office and he starts asking her about company affairs. Paula has found Smitty, but because he doesn't recognize her, she has become his secretary.

This is complete news to us. We later learn that at the urging of a psychiatrist Paula has decided to wait until Smitty recovers his memory on his own. Our attachment to Smitty has kept offscreen the years of Paula's efforts to find him.

Surprises like these require some motivation. Usually some other material must justify suppressing information that we'd normally get when attached to a protagonist. The cabbie's arrival in *Where the Sidewalk Ends* is a standard bit of information; only

later do we realize that the cutaway suppressed Dixon's hiding of the body. In *The Trial of Mary Dugan* the forward momentum of a court case provides interest that replaces curiosity about what happened earlier. The elision of Paula's search in *Random Harvest* is covered by Smitty's rediscovery of his posh family and his burgeoning love affair with a young woman—which only increases the viewer's apprehension about what has become of Paula.

Suppression can be motivated by flashback construction too. *Edison, the Man* (1940) starts on the night of a dinner celebrating the inventor's life. A young reporter comes to interview him, and a string of flashbacks shows the progress of his career. Edison's wife is prominent in several scenes in the past, but she isn't present in the frame story. A chronological plot layout would have pressed the filmmakers to show her death, but the time gap between the last flashback episode and the present-time interview leaves her death to be taken for granted.

In *The Guilty* (1947), we discover what's left out when a concluding voice-over commentary breaks its frame. The bulk of the film is a tidy flashback told to a bartender by the hard-boiled protagonist. At the end of the flashback, we're surprised to see the protagonist arrested at the bar for the murder his roommate supposedly committed. As the police car carries him off, we now hear his voice as a detached narrator admitting his guilt: "So that's the whole story. . . ." The hero's original narration has misled us; the murder took place during an unmarked ellipsis in his flashback. He lied to the bartender, and to us.

When there's more than one major shift of attachment, the possibilities for suppression multiply. Restricted to one character for a while, we're carried to another, then back to the first, and so on. The moving spotlight can suppress information about the characters' activities. *Johnny O'Clock* (1946) establishes a pattern of alternation between a cop's investigation and Johnny's efforts to go straight. This oscillation keeps two murders and some important clues offscreen while we follow one line of action or the other.

There are more ingenious ways to hide, then divulge information. In *Sudden Fear* (1952), the prosperous Myra has married a fortune hunter, whom we suspect is colluding against her with

his old girlfriend. Our suspicion is confirmed when Myra learns one morning that a dictating machine has accidentally recorded the couple's plotting. The result is a playback scene in which she learns with growing horror that they intend to kill her. A perennial narrative device, the accidentally overheard conversation, has been revised to escalate the conflict to fever pitch, not least because of a recording glitch that sticks on the same line, "I know a way" a maddening thirty-one times.[10]

Sudden Fear supplies an auditory version of a gap-filling flashback, and not out of simple urge for variety. Had Myra been eavesdropping on the lovers' conversation in real time, she could have burst in and denounced them. Instead, she must helplessly listen to their plans unfold. All our attention is focused on her reactions, which build from shock and terror to a determination to fight back.[11] The typical forties suppression/revelation strategy has yielded a gripping emotional arc.

THE HOOKED AND THE UNHOOKED

A passage from one scene to the next, typically signaled by dissolves or fades, traditionally marks ellipses. Hollywood filmmakers enhanced the continuity with "hooks," images or lines of dialogue that linked scenes more tightly. When a character says she lives on Sutton Place and we dissolve to a sign for Sutton Place (*Sleep, My Love*, 1948), we have a hook.

Silent cinema, in America and elsewhere, had already developed hook transitions, but the technique became more refined when talkies arrived.[12] All the possibilities of sound/image integration were explored. A sound could hook to another sound, as when a question at the end of one scene leads to an answer at the start of the next. A sound could hook to an image launching the next scene, as in the Sutton Place example. An image could hook to another image as well (figs. 5.5 and 5.6). In *And Then There Were None*, an image hooks to a sound when the ominous centerpiece displaying the ten little Indians dissolves to the prince playing the Indians song on the piano.

Citizen Kane (1941) provided filmmakers a catalog of virtuoso hooks, some fairly aggressive. A line of dialogue ending one scene

5.5. A visual hook in *And Then There Were None* (1945): A close-up of a syringe dissolves . . .

5.6. . . . to the doctor's valise it was stolen from.

may be completed in the next. Or a still photo may come to life, as when Kane takes over the *Chronicle* staff. Or a dissolve may graphically match compositions, as when the prologue shows a lighted window in Xanadu remaining in the same part of the frame from shot to shot. By pushing the principle of the hook into new areas of technique, such as two-dimensional composition, Welles brazenly called attention to the device as such.

Forties hooks can be abrupt in the Welles manner (figs. 5.7–5.9). Normally, though, hooks don't create bumpy transitions. Two shots in *Fallen Angel* (1945) contrasting the women in our antihero's life are quietly joined through the gesture and sound of pouring coffee. Hooks exemplify Hollywood's love of continuity; a hook provides a link at both the narrative and the stylistic levels.

Hooks usually favor omniscience, carrying us comfortably from point to point, but they can be deceptive. Fritz Lang, a master of duplicitous narration, offers an outstanding example in *You Only Live Once* (1937), which makes us, by faulty inference, assume that the protagonist has committed robbery and murder. Lang's hooks ease our passage toward rash judgment.[13]

Many 1940s filmmakers eagerly explored ways of using transitions to mislead us. Lang was again in the forefront with *The Woman in the Window* (1944). Professor Wanley, relaxing at his club, selects a luxury edition of *The Song of Solomon* (a hint that he has unfulfilled desires while his wife is away). He settles in an armchair and asks the manservant to remind him when it's 10:30: "Sometimes I'm inclined to lose track of time." As he reads,

5.7. An abrupt Wellesian transition between scenes in *Criminal Court* (1946), directed by *Kane*'s editor Robert Wise: A witness practices his false testimony.

5.8. "This is the man I saw firing the shots."

5.9. A cutback reveals the witness now in court.

there's a dissolve to the ticking clock on the mantelpiece chiming 10:30, and we pull back to see the servant telling Wanley the time. He rises to go out on his adventure in homicide.

At the climax of *The Woman in the Window*, when Wanley has apparently committed suicide, we find him slumped in another armchair, a ticking clock behind him. In close-up, his face falls and he apparently dies. But a hand comes in to shake his shoulder, a clock chimes offscreen, he stirs to wakefulness, and the servant's voice says, "It's 10:30, Professor Wanley." The transition into the dream had been eased by a hook: the time mentioned in the dialogue and shown on the clock face. Crucially, we aren't shown the moments of Wanley initially nodding off. That bit of time would be too clear a hint that what follows might be purely subjective. A symmetrical hook takes us out of the dream and back to the clubroom, and only then do we realize that the nar-

ration, thanks to unobtrusive continuity, fooled us. Gentle hooks can create a false sense of omniscience.

CHARACTERIZATION, FLAT OR UNFLATTERING

A movie character's personality seems like a pretty solid presence; we think we know what Scarlett O'Hara or Nick Charles is thinking and feeling. But that transparency isn't given us in the way we come to know our friends. It's constructed by film form and style. We come to know the character, like the rest of the story world, through the unfolding plot structure and the flow of information provided by narration. When some information is suppressed, characterization can become more complex.

Start with the baseline: the fixed and stable character. Our sense of reliable characterization owes a lot to Hollywood's first-impression tactic. Usually the film supplies a set of initial cues that will prove trustworthy. Bramble, crawling out of his tank and doggedly seeking shelter in *Five Graves to Cairo*, shows himself to be resourceful and obstinate. In *Cover Girl*, Rusty and Danny are presented from the start as sincere lovers with clear-cut career plans. The three veterans brought together at the beginning of *The Best Years of Our Lives* immediately establish their traits and their concerns about blending into civilian life.

Critics often complained that the reliance on first impressions was symptomatic of movies' wooden characterizations. The modern novel or play might gradually reveal a multifaceted personality or show profound character change. By contrast, movies favored plot over character. Writers sweated to insert predictable character types into new situations. Recall Monroe Stahr's tidy lesson in scene construction in Fitzgerald's novel *The Love of the Last Tycoon*. A woman enters an office and burns her gloves. The incident doesn't rely on characterization; we don't know the woman's traits. It's the circumstances that intrigue us. Why does she burn the gloves? Why does she deny owning them when she gets a phone call? And who is the man watching her from a corner?

The tyranny of incident kept Hollywood characterization simple, or so its critics believed. The movies' view of human nature "is even more standardized, sentimental, uncritical, and childish

than that of the average popular novel," wrote a literary historian in 1941.[14] Novelists, including James T. Farrell and Raymond Chandler, were just as harsh. In 1950 anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker agreed, declaring that the Hollywood character is either thoroughly good or thoroughly bad, is incapable of change, and invariably earns a deserved reward or punishment. A hero can do no wrong "of his own volition," while the villain "can do no good and cannot be saved."[15]

Even as Powdermaker was writing, filmmakers were responding to her critique; the dismissive *Variety* review of her book remarked that films had become more mature since her 1947 visit to the movie colony.[16] Late 1940s films contain many characters of some complexity. One can hardly call Tom Dunson of *Red River* a pure villain, while the ending of *The Snake Pit* (1948) doesn't count as an unadulterated triumph. Filmmakers were giving us the cursed protagonists of *Nightmare Alley* (1947), *Champion* (1949), *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1950), and *Young Man with a Horn* (1950). Still to come were the panicked protagonists of *Act of Violence* (1951) and *High Noon* (1952). But even in earlier years, one has to wonder if Powdermaker watched films like *Citizen Kane* (1941), *H. M. Pulham, Esq.* (1941), *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), *The Suspect* (1945), and *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946). What of the complicated heroines of *The Hard Way* (1943) and *Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman* (1947)? What of the psychiatricals, with their efforts to probe confused motives and self-destructive impulses?

Commentators subtler than Powdermaker saw that some films gave us characters of mixed morality, or persons who changed in significant ways. But usually even these tactics seemed contrived and conventional. The Good-Bad Man of silent Westerns, typified by William S. Hart as a tough gunslinger who reforms, was joined in the 1940s by what two social researchers called the Good-Bad Girl. "The good woman may appear for a time to be bad, so that she acquires an exciting aura which is not entirely dissipated when her goodness becomes established." Gilda, Martha Ivers, and Vivian of *The Big Sleep* (1946) are examples.[17]

Similarly, in *Casablanca* (1943), *Mr. Lucky* (1943), and other films Barbara Deming disclosed a conversion narrative that

moved a hero from selfish isolation to participation in the communal effort to win the war.[18] Essentially, she argued, Hollywood devised new clichés of plot that demanded new clichés of character. Parker Tyler was largely alone in seeing the advantages of stock characters like the Somnambule (the wispy, semihypnotized woman yearning for sexual fulfillment) and the Good Villain (the tough guy with a streak of honor). For Tyler, Hollywood's conventional figures enabled stars to participate in an elaborate charade akin to play, ritual, and dream. We don't look for subtle characterization in puppet shows or *commedia dell'arte*.[19]

Yet the history of studio cinema has played host to many models of characterization. Stock characters could become vivid through a blend of star images and the particulars of performance. A gangster played by James Cagney would be pugnacious and volatile, but the portrayal would be shaded for each occasion. In addition, sound movies, as Gilbert Seldes noted, made secondary players, aptly called "character actors," more prominent than in silent film, and they added tang to scenes.[20] Both tendencies would continue through the 1940s, as new stars emerged and many of the character actors (Henry Travers, Marjorie Main) became our familiar friends. Even with well-worn plot premises and character types, both stars and secondary actors could create something fresh.

And despite critics' objections, there were still signs of complex characterization. The "behavioral" presentation of character that dominated the early sound cinema relaxed somewhat in the 1940s. Dramas turned less on misunderstanding or circumstance and more on errors of judgment or flaws in temperament. A plot might be based on the question, What sort of person is this? Investigation films like *Kane*, *Keeper of the Flame* (1942), and *Ruthless* (1948) make this question explicit, but something similar happens in the psychoanalytical films. In addition, characters may exhibit psychological problems of various sorts—usually guilt, as in *The Letter* (1940), *The Unfaithful* (1947), and *The Accused* (1949). The mystery film proved adept at creating characters who dissemble, who fool themselves, or who are torn by conflicting impulses.

Sometimes the shading was an unintended by-product of sanitizing sources. In *Suspicion* (1941) and *In a Lonely Place*, the

guilty parties of the original novels are made innocent, but the endings don't dispel the shadows clinging to them. Similarly, the tactic of showing sympathy for the devil, seen in *This Gun for Hire* (1942), *Hangover Square* (1945), and *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), created villains who were at least pathetically understandable. In one Hollywood novel, a screenwriter proposes a plot in which "the 'good' guy is the killer and still a good guy."[21] Another novel of moviemaking notes that the script's protagonist is amoral: "For him good and bad are mixed up. He is capable of heroic deeds but he does them for the wrong reasons."[22] In *The Reckless Moment* (1949), a blackmailer repudiates his scheme as he grows to love his victim, while Tom Dunson of *Red River*, whipping his crew relentlessly through a cattle drive, gains a horrifying tenacity. Even James Stewart, personification of bumbling virtue in the 1930s, turns nearly hysterical in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1947) and psychotically vengeful in *Winchester '73* (1950).

Other ambivalent plots gave us the figure of the antihero, typified by Walter Neff in *Double Indemnity* (1944). Up-and-coming stars like Robert Ryan, Burt Lancaster, Richard Widmark, and Dana Andrews were called on to play men with mixed motives and confused purposes. The hero as heel, best personified in Kirk Douglas, became a fixture of American cinema. So did the self-destructive woman, as played by Ida Lupino, Lana Turner, and Susan Hayward. Many stars revamped their personas to portray tainted characters. Charles Boyer, Joseph Cotten, Humphrey Bogart, Charles Laughton, George Brent, Gregory Peck, Tyrone Power, Joan Fontaine, Barbara Stanwyck, Anne Baxter, Jennifer Jones, and others began to play cheats and killers, sympathetic or not. William Holden, the awkward yokel of *Our Town* (1940) could become a ruthless gunman (*The Dark Past*, 1949) and a cynical gigolo (*Sunset Boulevard*, 1950).

The reorientation of stars' images might seem like strong evidence for a morbid, anxious spirit pervading postwar America. But the same period saw the emergence of stars presenting a much sunnier disposition, from June Allyson, Grace Kelly, and Jane Wyman to Red Skelton and Peter Lawford. The growth of shadowy star images in the late forties probably has more proximate causes. Producers and directors, becoming more indepen-

dent, pushed against the Hays Office strictures, and wartime conditions relaxed censorship enough to allow harsher material to get onscreen. The semidocumentary and combat films, along with the rising popularity of hard-boiled fiction and suspense stories, drove some filmmakers toward cheerless plots.

Some stars wanted to essay serious roles; in a sense, they pressed for their own switches and schema revision. In 1937 Robert Montgomery urged MGM to make *Night Must Fall* so he could portray a chummy murderer, and he was nominated for an Academy Award. Already the hallmark of prestigious cinema was not light comedy but grim drama. Burt Lancaster sought out the role of the tormented son in the screen adaptation of *All My Sons* (1948), and Tyrone Power, a suave Zorro and matador in the early forties, angled to play the depraved carnival huckster in *Nightmare Alley*. Women could get attention for playing tougher parts too, as *Mildred Pierce* showed. Joan Crawford politicked for her ambivalent role in *Daisy Kenyon* (1947). The 1947 Best Actress nominees for the Oscar included stars who played in *Possessed*, *Smash-Up*, *Gentleman's Agreement*, and *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1947). Forties characterization supports James Agee's suggestion that films don't reflect the taste of the public but betray the makers' inclinations. A lot of what's onscreen is there because the talent wants it, and creators gamble that the audience will enjoy what it's given.

MODERN COMBAT TACTICS

In any case, it's not only a matter of designing characters as plausible individuals. We have access to those individuals, rounded or flat, only through plot structure and narration. We should expect, then, that more complex plotting and narration could create more complex characters. Once new storytelling methods became available, characterization could thicken in accord with the oblique narrative treatment.

The flashback is a case in point. Originally, *Citizen Kane*'s "prismatic" flashbacks were designed to portray a many-sided individual. To a lesser extent, as we've seen, Rocky, the West Point cadet in *Beyond Glory*, gains psychological nuance through

the welter of flashbacks treating him. In *Lydia* (1941), the returns to the past show that this buttoned-up old woman once burned with fierce passion, while the embedded flashbacks of *The Locket* (1946) show that the chipper Nancy is a sweet-faced monster.

Likewise, the flow of story information could be channeled to suggest character revelation or development or opacity. *My Cousin Rachel* (1952) restricts us, with unusual severity, to what young Philip Ashley knows about the motives of the woman who marries his cousin Ambrose in far-off Italy. Ambrose's letters suggest that his new wife Rachel is poisoning him, and when Ambrose dies Philip suspects murder. Rachel comes to the Cornish family home, and Philip falls under her spell. He eventually marries her and signs over his entire estate. The pendulum swings again when Philip takes ill and begins to believe Rachel is poisoning him. But then he finds evidence that Rachel truly loves him, despite her intention to leave him and go off with the sinister lawyer Rainaldi. By the end of the film, after Rachel dies, Philip is genuinely baffled. He never learns whether Rachel was treacherous or simply opportunistic, and neither do we. It's as if *Suspicion* had left us uncertain about Johnnie's real intentions to the very end.

Moving-spotlight narration can yield virtual omniscience, but it can also make a character more complicated by forcing us to modify our first impressions. This tactic is pursued in *Swell Guy* (1947). The film begins with crosscutting devoted to Jim Duncan's return from the war. While his family and community prepare to welcome back this heroic correspondent, we see him abandon the rich woman who has paid his way home. Instead of meeting his family for dinner, he visits a bar and picks up Marian, a heedless good-time girl. Jim's mother knows he's as bad as his reprobate father, but she lets the rest of the family think he's a paragon.

Jim gets busy fleecing the rubes and flirting with his foursquare brother's wife, but he presents the public image of modesty and great accomplishment. We know, as the locals do not, that he is a liar and a cheat. The thrust of the film is double: How far will he succeed in imposing his will on others before they realize what he is? And since he's running out of money, how will he gain enough to leave town? Given our range of knowledge, we can watch both processes at work.

At the same time, the film's narration reveals to us alone some glints of virtue in Jim's makeup. Winning $800 shooting dice, he plans to give it to his brother to start a business. But no sooner has he won it than he's lost it all in a swaggering coin toss. Similarly, he's prepared to abandon Marian when she announces she's pregnant. But in the subsequent scene, which none of the townsfolk witness, we learn that he truly loves the Parisian wife who has thrown him out. And at the end he saves the life of his nephew Tony, who tries to replicate one of Jim's suicidal stunts. In sum, the opening crosscutting has established the near-sociopathic dimension of Jim's character, but later portions of the film display him in private moments that coax us to qualify our first impressions. *Swell Guy* shows how a judicious mixture of restriction and omniscience creates unexpected complexity of character.

Swell Guy lets us in on both Jim's predatory schemes and his bursts of kindness. The restrictive narration of *My Cousin Rachel* keeps us in the dark throughout, raising and puncturing our suspicions about the femme fatale and never answering the key question. A film can also have it both ways, shifting our focus while still hiding a character's traits. *Daisy Kenyon*, one of the most psychologically opaque films of the 1940s, gives us plenty of information about the characters but still obliges us to test their behavior at nearly every instant.

The film plays a moving spotlight over a strange love quadrangle. Daisy makes her living as a fashion illustrator. For eight years she has been the mistress of Dan O'Mara, a self-assured corporate lawyer. Dan takes refuge with Daisy as respite from his volatile wife Lucile, but he remains deeply attached to his young daughters. The fourth point of the quadrangle is Peter Lapham, a yacht designer recently discharged from the army. Daisy accepts dates with Peter because Dan is seldom available.

Hollywood dramaturgy depends on goal-directed characters, yet in *Daisy Kenyon* the characters don't seem to know what they want. The obscurity of their motives and purposes is enhanced by the utterly objective narration that rules nearly the entire film. Elizabeth Janeway's original novel provides lots of material for inner monologue, and one version of the script included flashbacks and voice-over commentary. The finished film, however,

forces us to appraise the characters wholly on the basis of their behavior.

Moreover, we seldom see any of them alone, and they don't confide in friends. Often their aims and inner lives come through only in their strategies of self-presentation. They may be dissembling or simply assuming a certain attitude by habit.

Daisy is the most forthright and transparent, but she's also the most confused. In the first scene, after Dan has broken yet another date with her, she declares, "I think I'm through." By the end of the scene she has given in again. She will vacillate in this way throughout the film. When Dan summons her to meet him after a trip, she's reluctant ("I love you too, I guess"). He strolls into the terminal bar confident he'll find her at a table, and there she is. Much later, when Peter seems indifferent to Dan's suggestion that Daisy help him get divorced from Lucile, she's thunderstruck. Peter practically shoves her back into Dan's arms. Daisy never hides her uncertainties and mood swings, but these make her goals ill-defined.

In contrast to Daisy, Dan is a master of what Erving Goffman calls impression management.[23] He is utterly confident, in control of every situation. In the first scene Daisy wants to break off their affair, and he agrees to leave—vowing never to return. Pragmatic frankness or a bluff? Whichever it is, Daisy gives in. We see him cut a swath through his office and the Stork Club, calling everyone Honeybunch. Dan can calm the frantic Lucile, but when she slaps one of their girls, he shifts from tender consolation of his daughter to making a steely threat against his wife. At first Dan seems a caricature of the bullying man of affairs, wanting both wife and mistress, but he surprises us by taking a pro bono case involving a Japanese American cheated out of his farm. What's his purpose in doing something so altruistic?

Peter's goals seem even harder to pin down. At their first meeting, at a party, he gives Daisy all his combat ribbons. She calls him "nice, but a little unstable." Henry Fonda's star image may make Peter more attractive than Dan (played by Dana Andrews), but the script and the direction dilute our sympathy. When Peter mentions his wife, Daisy retorts with a wisecrack about married soldiers who date. He casually replies that his wife is dead. Many

5.10. *Daisy Kenyon* (1947): "We were talking about your wife." "You were, yes. She's dead."

forties directors would give this shattering information the full treatment, with close-ups and underscoring. But Preminger muffles the moment by having Peter walk past Daisy and direct the line to a corner of the room (fig. 5.10).

Whatever sympathy Peter's eccentricities may engender is shot through with uneasiness. He seems cockeyed, and not in an ingratiating screwball way. He frets that Sixth Avenue is now called Avenue of the Americas. Sometimes he clams up and sometimes he babbles. His cryptic remarks during his first date with Daisy aren't exactly seduction lines.

> I'm always worse off than I think I am.
> Nothing else here is real.
> I need to kiss your neck.
> Would you like to get out of here and go someplace else? I wouldn't. I like it fine here with you. Where are we, anyway?

How to explain this scattershot conversational style? The narration grants Peter only one scene alone, a brief but disturbing moment after he has called Daisy. Put off by Daisy's excuse of going out with friends, he discovers her fib by spying from across the street. He follows her and her friend Mary to a movie and stations himself outside the theater for hours. Might this returning vet turn stalker?

Compared with the swaggering Dan, Peter appears as confused as Daisy. He woos her from the start, yet he also pulls back from her. At the end of their first evening, she asks if he'll call

her on Sunday morning. He replies solemnly: "I love you" before walking away. But then he doesn't call. When she later upbraids him for not phoning, he says simply, "I forgot"—hardly what we expect from a man in the transports of love. In another somersault, he'll soon propose marriage.

The characters' opaque emotional to-and-fro is emphasized by the moving-spotlight narration. We don't witness Dan's decision to take the Nisei's lawsuit, but when he tells Daisy he's done it, it seems that his motive is crassly selfish. "I took it because it's gonna make you love me like mad." Yet later, in a scene Daisy doesn't witness, Dan seems to summon up genuine commitment to the case when he tells his father-in-law that he's entitled to "fight some lucrative race prejudices, including your own." Perhaps Daisy's threat to break off the affair in the opening scene weighed on him more than we thought? Or perhaps taking the case, even for shabby motives, has pushed him toward a more sincere advocacy? Or perhaps he just wants to shame his father-in-law? Because we get only glimpses of the characters at intervals, such questions nag us throughout the film. Had we been firmly attached to one character—had this been wholly Daisy's story or Dan's or Peter's—these puzzles might not arise, but then the characters wouldn't seem so many-sided.

In reply to Dan's declaration that he's taken the case, Daisy agrees: "I love you like mad." But then he has to dash off, and soon enough she's home, annoyed at the old cycle starting again. It's at this point that Peter follows Daisy to the movie theater. Later he calls on her and seems to show more of his feelings. He says he's in a mood he can't escape. Since his wife's death in a car accident and his war service, he's felt empty. But she declares this foolish. "I don't believe a word of it." She accuses him of sounding like a case history. "Okay, have your tragedy, have your melodrama." She thinks he's overdramatizing; when she calls him on it, we have to ask too. By the end, though, the film asks us to consider that someone can be at once sincere *and* manipulative.

He kisses her. She insists she loves Dan. Nonplussed, Peter responds by proposing, but he makes the offer awkwardly. "Please come and meet my brother and sister in Scarsdale." We never see these people; they probably don't exist. "Come live with me and

be my love. Or better still, let me come here and live with you." After this string of non sequiturs Daisy pulls away, flustered, and suggests they start over with a new first date. He agrees and leaves, and she looks after him with puzzled tenderness.

Fade to eighteen days later. In the film's most startling ellipsis, we learn—when Dan returns from Washington—that Daisy and Peter have married. Keeping their courtship and wedding offscreen leaves more questions: Did Peter come to seem more focused? Did Daisy embrace his quirks? Did she marry him out of pique, because Dan was out of town so long? Most basically, does she actually love Peter? Is she over Dan?

Now ensconced in a New England seacoast town, Daisy and Peter seem to be a happy couple, but soon enough new doubts assail her, and us. One night she sees Peter thrashing in bed while we hear tumultuous music. The film forgoes the usual option of showing his dream through mental imagery. The detached narration merely suggests alternative causes—combat, memories of his wife, even indigestion—none of which gets definitely assigned. Daisy's worries are multiplied when she finds an unsent note Peter had written to his wife, Suzy (after her death, no less). Another film would have shown us Daisy making this potentially dramatic discovery; instead, she tells Peter about finding it, to be met with hints about multiple, confused motives.

PETER: I'd forgotten about it. Do you go through my papers often, sweetheart?

DAISY: It was in the common property drawer—almost as if you wanted me to see it. (pause) I'm glad I did.

Did Peter in fact forget about it, or did he leave it for Daisy to find?

In the course of the scene, Peter reminds Daisy of something we hadn't known. She has never said she loves him. Immediately he adds, "I like you for not saying it." Here, at about the midpoint of the film, he demands a deep and abiding devotion from her—not the quick professions that she and Dan have made to one another, almost by rote. Another oscillation: In the very next scene, standing with him at the rain-streaked window, she says "I love you." Even that's not enough for him, though. "Say it again.

5.11. The first toast: No more secrets?

Put my name on the end of it." They toast with two shot glasses (fig. 5.11).

After this scene there's no place to go except to start the film over. As in the opening scene, Dan arrives at Daisy's Manhattan apartment in a cab. Again he pours himself coffee as if he owned the kitchen, and again he presses her for romance. This time he's more violent, and Daisy fights him off. And as at the beginning, Dan goes home to a household in turmoil. This time, however, when he calls Daisy to apologize, his wife Lucile listens in, bursts shrieking into the conversation, and declares she wants a divorce. The second part of the film begins at a higher pitch than the first, with nearly all the parties in the love quadrangle increasingly desperate.

And again everyone is muddled about motives. Peter seems oddly inert: absent from the film for fourteen minutes, he withdraws into cryptic passivity. Instead of helping Daisy decide whether to act as Dan's correspondent in the divorce case, he simply leaves her to Dan. And Dan has lost his poise, at one point snapping at his wife, "For a long time I didn't think you were worth killing." The shock of this line, amplified by its effect on the little daughter who overhears it, casts another light on Dan's personality. Perhaps he'll be the one who goes violently off the rails?

At first Dan wants to fight to retain access to his daughters, but he decides not to ruin Daisy's reputation. So he gives up and lets Lucile have everything. His only hope is marrying Daisy. The unflappable, hard-to-read Peter seems ready to let Daisy divorce him, except that he very reasonably wants her to declare her intentions. Under all this pressure, Daisy flees from both men and

takes refuge in work at the cottage. Once more she doesn't know what she wants.

The climax arrives when Dan and Peter phone Daisy and tell her they're on their way for a final showdown. She rushes away in the car, with the ringing phone haunting her as an auditory flashback—an emphatic departure from the objective presentation of the rest of the story. She crashes the car. As she hobbles out of the wreck, silence on the sound track and a long, sober crane shot moving back suggest that she's found some stability. Later she'll assure her men that at that moment she understood: "I know what I want."

Maybe. Daisy returns to the cottage, where Dan and Peter are calmly playing cards. She says she wants both of them to leave. Peter quietly asks her to tell him if she wants a divorce. Then—typical Peter—before she can answer, he steps outside. Dan presses his case. "Let's go to Nassau!" But Daisy tells him that she was bound to him merely by the memory of their best times, not by true devotion. He accepts defeat and leaves.

Dan expects Peter to go back to town with him, but no such thing happens. Peter dismisses him, calling him Honeybunch, and goes back in to find Daisy waiting for him. The film's last lines crackle like lightning. Peter says Dan put up a good fight, and Daisy asks what *he* knows about fighting. "When it comes to modern combat tactics," he replies, "you're both babies compared to me."

Although Dan seems to have seized the initiative in every situation, Peter has been playing a long game. Perhaps he's the real master of impression management. Strategizing to win Daisy, he has taken advantage of her amorous confusion by his barrage of non sequiturs. He has tried frontal assault ("I love you" on the first date; "Will you marry me?" just before the second) and feigned withdrawal (neglecting to call her, dropping her into Dan's hands again and again). Although he's genuinely disturbed, as his night sweats suggest, he has enough poise to continue to play her. He probably has left Suzy's letter for her to find. He has definitely demanded that Daisy declare her love, after which he says he won't insist; when she confesses her love, he insists she use his full name. He has adjusted his tactics on the fly, but they

5.12. The final toast: Two glasses waiting for . . . which man?

are always designed to throw Daisy off balance. Peter played the Crazy Vet card so well that Daisy, in her headlong panic, became a Crazy Lady. She may think she's won, but she's traded an aggressive man for a passive-aggressive one.

That he has conquered her is shown by a gesture that's easy to miss. When he returns to the cottage after seeing Dan off, Daisy is at the counter, where she has two glasses of Scotch waiting (fig. 5.12). Her action mirrors the first happy ending (fig. 5.11). She had told him to leave the house, yet apparently she knew he was coming back. Did her "shock treatment" in the overturned car tell her to accept Peter? If so, why did she tell him to leave? It seems that the pendulum of Daisy's affections has reversed again, this time toward him. Or perhaps she's simply given up.

With *Daisy Kenyon* we're far beyond the prototype cases of "what they didn't know was." We're no longer concerned with the duke posing as a chauffeur or the unknown killer bumping off people on an island, or even Eve Kendall pretending to be Margo's loyal fan. Still, the principle of distributing, dispersing, and concealing story information is the same. In *Daisy* the uncertain goals, the alternative possible motives, and the ellipses in presentation show that moving-spotlight narration, usually devoted to giving us a satisfying degree of omniscience, can judiciously omit not only plot events and private purposes, but interpersonal stratagems and aspects of personality.[24] And we can be left with anomalies rather than full understanding. It's not, Mrs. Christie maintains, unfair to leave things out; actually, it can be pretty rewarding.

INTERLUDE

Identity Thieves and Tangled Networks

ADAPTATIONS WERE CENTRAL TO THE FIVE FAT YEARS, BUT in any era, filmmakers' choices about how closely to stick to the book or play will vary according to the norms in place at the time. The ways originals were squashed or stretched or padded reveal some schemas typical of the 1940s, and inevitably the "what they didn't know was" problem will shape the process.

We can see that interplay between restricted and unrestricted narration at work in two thrillers. Unlike melodramas and romantic comedies, which encourage us to know nearly everything (the better to anticipate how characters will react), thrillers tend to maintain a degree of ignorance about why certain things are happening. In the woman-in-peril variant, the narration largely restricts us to the heroine but also intermittently supplies glimpses of action beyond her ken. We can fear *with* the heroine, since we're anxious and uncertain as well; and we can fear *for* her, since we're privy to threats she doesn't know about. Yet we aren't told everything about the situation; mysteries persist until the end.

Two films, a straightforward but skillful programmer and an A feature drawn from a well-known source, show how fine-grained this process can be. One needed to replot and compress its source. The other, taken from a thirty-minute radio play, needed to be

expanded. Both adaptations typify Hollywood storytelling strategies of the period.

B-PLUS SUSPENSE

My Name Is Julia Ross (1945) was adapted from a spy novel.[1] In the book, the plot concentrates on an eccentric detective's efforts to rescue a kidnapped woman. The film eliminates the spy component and drops the detective. It turns the story into a woman-in-peril situation, centering on Julia and the threat posed by a deranged husband figure. The concentration on Julia's mounting panic and the stratagems of the husband's allies yields a tight B picture lasting only about an hour.

The film offers a clear-cut example of wide-ranging narration. Julia, without job or family, accepts what she thinks is a secretarial post. But her employer, Ralph Hughes, has killed his wife, and he and his mother aim to substitute Julia for the dead woman. Then they'll dispose of Julia. They drug her, destroy all traces of her identity, and take her to a remote Cornwall estate. In a switch on *Gaslight* (1944), they convince the locals that Julia is mad and prepare to stage her death. Meanwhile Dennis, Julia's one friend (the helper male figure conventional in many Gothics) tries to find her.

Julia tries to escape, but her captors outmaneuver her. She threatens to call the police, but Ralph's mother locks her in her room and tells the servants she's raving. She writes a letter to Dennis and smuggles it past the family, but her captors learn of it and send a confederate to London, where he steals the letter before it's given to Dennis. In desperation Julia fakes a suicide attempt, hoping she can confide in the doctor who arrives; but the doctor turns out to be part of the gang. Throughout these conflicts, Julia must fight off Ralph's attempts to rape her. And everything is subjected to the pressure of time. Ralph and his mother intend to fake an accident as soon as they have convinced the local hospital of Julia's insanity.

Julia's mounting fear and her struggle to free herself are rendered suspenseful by judicious glimpses of the plans laid against her. After she has accepted the job and left to pack her things, the

scene continues as Mrs. Hughes dismantles the fake employment agency that has lured her. Later, as Julia sleeps in the London flat the family has rented, we see Mrs. Hughes and Ralph burn her purse and identification. But the narration doesn't reveal the full nature of their scheme right away. As Ralph, frowning, methodically slices Julia's lingerie, his mother chides him: "If it weren't for your temper, we wouldn't be in this awful trouble today." Ralph's madness will be given fuller expression later, but this is enough to hint that his fondness for knives has had lethal consequences. As the film goes on, we see mother and son's step-by-step tactics but not their governing strategy. Not until quite late does a conversation explain what my synopsis declared at the outset: Ralph has killed his wife and Julia will be disposed of as a substitute.

The narration enhances the suspense by tracing Dennis's failed efforts to find Julia. After she misses an appointment, he finds that the Hughes entourage has left the flat. The landlady in Julia's apartment building has heard nothing from her, and the employment agency she visited has vanished. Dennis's efforts hit a dead end, and we wonder how he can rescue her.

At this point the film provides some clever ellipses. First, Julia writes Dennis a letter that she intends to mail from the village. Mrs. Hughes finds it and substitutes a blank piece of paper. She wants Julia to mail the dummy letter, because if Julia thinks Dennis is on the way, she's likely to be more manageable. But later, when Ralph is driving Julia to town for an outing, we learn that Julia knows about the blank message and slips in a real one. She even lets Ralph lick the envelope.

When Julia fakes her suicide, another gap in our knowledge creates suspense. Julia takes the kindly man visiting her for a doctor, but he's actually Peters, a member of the gang whom we saw early in the film (but not since). The family learns that Julia got her message into the mail, so Peters goes to London to intercept it. Peters is shown stealing it, with the landlady running after him and shouting for the police. Will Peters be caught? The uncertainty will pay off at the climax.

The final minutes of the film bring together all the plot strands. Crosscutting between Ralph and Julia shows him preparing a false step on the staircase to trip her up as she cautiously watches.

When Julia flees to her room and barricades her door, the narration plays a bit of a trick on us, showing her running to her window high above the ocean. Ralph hears her scream, bursts in, and sees her figure lying in the surf below. Now the narration attaches us wholly to the mother and son, who run downstairs and meet the asylum doctor. They expect him to certify Julia's death as suicide. Ralph hurries to the beach and finds Julia still breathing. As he picks up a rock to finish her off, a policeman and Dennis spring out to seize him. Ralph tries to escape but is shot dead.

The gaps are rapidly filled in. Now we learn that after the landlady's pursuit, the police captured Peters and found the letter. We also learn that after Julia screamed she tossed her dressing gown out onto the rocks and fled through a hidden stairway she had found earlier. She met Dennis and the policeman on the road and led them back to the beach, where she played dead to ensnare Ralph. Through quick thinking, the victim has proved herself heroic. To preserve the final surprise, her subterfuge has been masked for us by the sequence showing Ralph and his mother leaving the house and encountering the arriving doctor. Julia's escape seems less miraculous because the plot has earlier concealed some of her countermeasures and distracted us with the gang's plans and reactions. As usual, "omniscience" is paradoxically limited, and the overarching narration, following Agatha Christie's advice, leaves some things out.

CARDIAC NEUROTIC ON LINE ONE

Sorry, Wrong Number (1948) faced different adaptation problems. The original 1943 play was designed for radio. Over the phone a bedridden woman hears a plan for an impending murder. She tries to contact the police and convince them the threat is real. We realize sooner than she does that she is the target. In a clever exploitation of radio technique, the action consists wholly of her phone calls, her fuming monologues, and the noise of busy signals and of receivers being slammed down.

Many of the film's viewers would have known the radio play from its frequent broadcasts, so the core situation had to be respected.[2] Yet the play ran a mere thirty minutes. The task facing

screenwriter Lucille Fletcher (author of the original) and director Anatole Litvak was to stretch out the suspense and multiply mysteries without seeming to pad.

A rigorous adaptation of *Sorry, Wrong Number* would show the protagonist in bed, talking and listening throughout the whole movie.[3] Instead, Fletcher and Litvak treat the bedroom as a sort of central switchboard, a relay point among several characters and situations summoned up by Leona Stevenson's crisis. While tracing Leona's growing fear as she realizes the ramifications of the plot against her, the film's narration draws on narrative resources that had become common during the era.

Starting with the murderous-husband-and-threatened-wife schema, the film creates a complex backstory. The original play never explains what Leona's ailment is or why the husband wants to kill her, apart from the evident fact that she's a disagreeable invalid. The film makes her the spoiled daughter of a pharmaceutical magnate. She in effect buys the handsome Henry with a job in her father's corporation. Henry comes to resent his lowly position as the firm's "invoice king" and wants to strike out on his own. Leona and her father block his ambition, and Leona develops a psychosomatic condition that convulses her with heart attacks whenever her will is thwarted.

Trapped in a dead-end career and an abrasive marriage, Henry persuades Evans, a chemist in the firm, to help him smuggle out ingredients and sell them on the black market. Henry and Evans try to bypass their gangland partner Morano, but he insists on his cut. The debt comes to such a big sum that only by murdering Leona and inheriting her estate can Henry gain access to it. The whole plan goes awry when the district attorney's investigators discover the smuggling operation, arrest Morano, and come after Henry. By then, however, it's too late for Henry to call off the contract killing and, as in the play, Leona is murdered on schedule.

A 1930s film might have laid all the new backstory across the first parts of the plot, reserving the misdirected phone call for the climax. But true to the 1940s crisis structure, the backstory is supplied through flashbacks. We enter the plot just before the climax, when Leona inadvertently overhears two men scheduling

someone's murder for 11:15. She tries to get the operator to trace the call. She then tries to rouse the police, but the desk sergeant she reaches brushes her off. All this opening material adheres to the original. But then the murder threat is suspended and another problem emerges. Worried that Henry is very late coming home, Leona calls several people (none figuring in the radio drama), asking where her husband might be.

All but one of these conversations are accompanied by flashbacks. Each is quite restricted to the person recounting events, and each builds up a new mystery—a crucial strategy for intriguing viewers familiar with the radio play. Henry's secretary tells Leona that a blonde woman called on him earlier that day. Why? What did she want? It transpires that the woman is Sally Hunt, Leona's college friend. This motivates Leona's recollection of stealing Henry from Sally in college. She also recalls that on their honeymoon she found that Henry kept a secret picture of Sally. So was Sally's visit part of a revived affair? We're left to wonder until Sally's next call. She explains that she met Henry to tell him that her husband, who works in the DA's office, is investigating him. For what? Sally doesn't know, but she did follow her husband's colleagues to a mysterious house in Staten Island, where a man was delivering something in a briefcase.

At the film's midpoint, Western Union notifies Leona of a telegram from Henry: he's leaving for a convention in Boston. At this point the film provides a mélange of auditory flashbacks, as Leona puts together pieces of conversations and realizes that she is the killers' likely target. In desperation she calls her doctor, and he tells her of Henry's visit to his office some weeks before. His flashback contains yet another one, Henry's account of Leona's history of heart attacks. These always seem to recur when he tries to loosen her grip on him. Reacting to what he's heard from Henry, Dr. Alexander agrees to write a letter to Leona explaining his diagnosis of her as a "cardiac neurotic."

While multiplying mysteries, the flashbacks provide an exemplary case of 1940s character shading. Except for a few moments at the very end of the film, we never see Henry in the present, outside any flashback. He becomes somewhat protean in the course of the plot. Since viewers who know the original play realize that

ITTN.1. *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1948): We are privy, as Dr. Alexander is not, to Henry's furious response to learning that Leona's illness is purely mental. Soon he'll knock the phone to the floor.

Leona is likely to be his target, the film adds mystery and suspense by explaining his evolution into a killer.

The young Henry who enters Leona's flashback is a brusque, independent man who resists being seduced by her father's power. In Sally's flashback, he's a bitter sidelined executive who drinks too much and glances around uneasily in public places. (Later we'll learn that's because he's being tracked by Morano.) Dr. Alexander's flashback reflects the doctor's naïveté by presenting Henry as sincerely worried about Leona's health. In telling Dr. Alexander of Leona's illness, he seems to be a man yearning for a chance to succeed on his own. Correspondingly, he portrays Leona as a hysterical wife whose selfishness drove her to her bed.

Without fanfare, each flashback mildly suggests each person's impression of Henry. We're never led to doubt the accuracy of what we see, but each version colors him a little differently—his own story, unsurprisingly, presenting him in the best light of all. Crucially, though, we're privy to one moment of extra information. Within Dr. Alexander's flashback, Henry learns that Leona is healthy enough to live for a long time. When the doctor steps away, the filmic narration breaks with his range of knowledge. We're allowed to see Henry furiously twist the phone cord and knock the phone to the floor (fig. ITTN.1). This suggests that he has been counting on Leona's imminent death and has merely been playing the role of the worried husband. At this moment he is ready to wreak violence on Leona, but instead he attacks a telephone, the object we've associated with her from the start.

Morano's demand for payment will provide a deadline for her murder.

Throughout the hours of Leona's search for Henry and her growing awareness of the danger she's in, Evans keeps phoning and asking Henry to contact him. At the climax Evans calls again to provide what he calls "the final message." As his flashback traces out the crimes he committed with Henry, we see Henry as callous and cunning—the most explicit recasting of his character, and the one most consistent with his plot to kill Leona.

The bits of backstory fall into place, and the mysteries that riddled the film's added material are cleared up. Now the film can proceed with straightforward suspense. Evans explains that although the gangster Morano has been arrested, he and Henry are still in danger from the police. Leona desperately calls a hospital in hopes of getting a nurse to come to her before the killer arrives. The camera backs out of her room through the window and descends to show an intruder entering the house. As Leona flounders helplessly on the bed, the phone rings again. It's Henry, surrounded by policemen who will pounce when he comes out of the phone booth. He confesses his theft and his murder plan to Leona, but now he wants her to live. He urges Leona to get to the window and scream for help before it's too late.

Throughout the film, Litvak's direction has avoided one standard treatment of phone conversations: cutting back and forth between the speakers on each line of dialogue. (We'll see something similar in *H. M. Pulham, Esq.*, 1941.) Instead the camera has usually stayed on either Leona or the other person, while replies are filtered through the receiver. At the climax, however, very fast cutting between husband and wife amplifies the suspense of the killer's approach. A shadow slides over Leona's face, and a passing train obliterates her scream as planned. The phone rings as Henry calls back. A gloved hand lifts the receiver, an offscreen voice replies, "Sorry, wrong number," and the receiver is set down (fig. ITTN.2). This moment nicely balances a shot in the film's opening (fig. ITTN.3).

The tightly focused radio play has been expanded, but the deadline and the array of incidents still spotlight Leona and her

ITTN.2. In the film's closing shot, we see the aftermath of Leona's murder and Henry's failed phone call: the receiver is hung up.

ITTN.3. At the film's start, in Henry's office the receiver is left off the hook in an effort to evade Morano's gang.

telephone. The secondary characters and subsidiary mysteries introduced in the film version enrich the characterizations of Leona and Henry. At one level the narration is fairly unrestricted, providing a variety of perspectives, but it's also doubly restricted. It's tied to a series of characters telling their tales, and then at a higher level those tales pass through the final filter of Leona's awareness.

True, at some points the camera wanders on its own, panning to a wedding photo or the clock, tracking along the empty hallway or to the Manhattan skyline outside. And near the very end, suspense arises from brief glimpses of the unknown killer moving through the household. But despite its fluctuations, the narration always returns to Leona and her phone as she gropes for it, drops it, flings it away, or fumbles with the dial.

The compact original plot has become a typically intricate 1940s flashback construction that puts Leona at the center of converging passions and deceptions. Playing roles of victim, witness, and investigator, she uncovers a pattern bringing together characters rich and poor, honest and crooked. The film's prologue shows operators at a telephone switchboard while a crawl title asserts, "In the tangled networks of a great city, the telephone is the unseen link between a million lives." The echo of both *Naked City* and O. Henry's Baghdad-on-the-Hudson is characteristic of 1940s dramaturgy and its fascination with the interweaving of many fates.

CHAPTER 6

Voices out of the Dark

I think we should take a revolutionary viewpoint of the screenplay of this story and we should tell it as the book does—through the eyes of Huw, the little boy. We should do much of the picture with him as an off-stage commentator with many of the scenes running silent and nothing but his voice over them. And then, of course, from time to time we will let the voices dissolve into scenes.

Darryl F. Zanuck, on *How Green Was My Valley*[1]

IN THE SENSE I'VE USED THE TERM, NARRATION REFERS TO the whole panoply of strategies charged with transmitting (or blocking) story information. A narrower use of the term refers to a particular technique, that of *voice-over* narration. This auditory commentary on the action, past or present, is as vivid a mark of 1940s cinema as flashbacks or block construction.

But who speaks? We might hear an external voice, that of an authoritative but external commentator endowed with a wide range of knowledge. Or the voice might belong to a character in the film, musing on what happened in the past or reporting it to a sympathetic listener. Any of these possibilities puts us on the familiar terrain of narration in the broader sense—a means of channeling information to the spectator. The voice-over device could exploit recent improvements in sound technology to create

the illusion of a storyteller communicating more or less directly with us.

THE VOCALIZING NARRATOR

Silent films had sometimes included character narrators who recounted an embedded tale or launched a flashback sequence. Their speeches would be given in dialogue intertitles, sandwiched between passages of images. Sound cinema permitted audible voice-over, and it allowed the commentary to run simultaneously with what was being shown. This synchronizing of word and image enabled music, camera movement, and voice to intensify the scene's expressive qualities.

During the 1930s, voice-over commentary was a mainstay of short subjects but seldom graced a feature. *The Phantom of Crestwood* (RKO, 1932) was a notable exception, accompanying two silent flashbacks with dialogue in the present. *The Power and the Glory* of 1933 gained more notice with its "narratage" technique, in which the commentator loaned his voice to a character in the flashback. But the shortcomings of rerecording technology made postsynching seem hollow and noisy. Historian Lea Jacobs has traced how new devices, chiefly push-pull noise reduction, eliminated distortion. Sound editors began to build a film's sound track out of many sound streams.[2]

Music and effects were the first elements to be rerecorded, and from midway through the decade, composers were able to synchronize long musical passages with action and dialogue quite precisely. This technique of underscoring would be exploited throughout the forties with great finesse.[3] Near the end of the 1930s, detailed image/music matching was enhanced when filmmakers discovered how to record and mix multiple tracks.[4]

In the same period, more exact volume control and equalization allowed sound effects to achieve unprecedented detailing. A B picture like *One Crowded Night* (1940) can capture sleeves brushing a diner's counter. A medium shot of two men drinking coffee can include the tiny sounds of their swallowing (*Fallen Angel*, 1945). In merely twenty seconds, *Lady on a Train* (1945)

gives us the noises of footsteps on carpets, stairs, and wood flooring, a bag tossed from a window onto a canvas car top, the swish of a door, and the telltale creak that reveals the heroine hiding behind it—all standing out against a fluctuating orchestral score. Such layering of effects and music was much easier to achieve in film than in radio, where the soundscape was created live and the sonic texture had to be thinner.

As for dialogue, by 1940 it too could be reliably reworked after shooting. Postdubbing could replace lines recorded on the set, and voice-over commentary could be precisely controlled. A good early example comes in *Lydia*, when the heroine's present-time remarks, miked rather close and dry, pepper a flashback that has a thinner sonic texture. A charming scene in *Magic Town* (1947) gives us three characters simultaneously reciting Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, Tennyson's *Charge of the Light Brigade*, and a passage from *Romeo and Juliet*, each a perfectly distinct sound stream.

While film sound was improving in the late 1930s, radio writers and directors also experimented with richer auditory worlds. To one-off sound effects Orson Welles added layered sound backgrounds, like the mix of Casbah noises in "Algiers" (1938). Welles, Arch Oboler, and Norman Corwin exploited sound montages, as well as choral passages in which unidentified voices chimed in to amplify a dramatic point.[5] Filmmakers' new tools for sound editing and mixing allowed them to expand and refine broadcasters' innovations.

Filmmakers' urge toward flashbacks naturally pressed them toward voice-over transitions, which were the simplest way to signal time shifts. Radio's storytelling model reinforced this option. Throughout the 1930s audiences had heard narrators in documentary films and newsreels, but radio was the true home of voice-over narration. News reports and play-by-play sports commentary gave announcers a primary role, while comedy and drama programs used narrators.[6] Orson Welles's "first-person singular" programs replaced the impersonal announcer with an informal narrator, a characterized storyteller who made the broadcast more intimate.[7] His 1938 adaptation of *Rebecca* borrowed the novel's first-person framing narration, a choice that

impressed David O. Selznick so much that he urged Hitchcock to consider it for their film. Selznick wrote that voice-over

> has never, to my knowledge, been used in a picture—except to a minor extent in Bill Howard's Fox picture of some years back called "Power and the Glory." . . . I wish you would give some thought to this idea. We might accomplish it by having the girl start to tell the story, and using her as the narrator over silent film until we slip into the picture proper, reverting to the technique at the end of the picture.[8]

The finished film does start with the heroine's voice-over recollection ("Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again"), although in the manner of many flashback films, it doesn't return to her at the end.[9]

Selznick was on the cutting edge; the vocalizing narrator soon emerged in several pictures. *Wuthering Heights* (released in April 1939) presents a flashback tale framed by the voice-over commentary of an eyewitness. About half an hour into *Stanley and Livingstone* (August 1939) Stanley writes entries in his journal, and his voice recites them over montages of his African trek. *The Roaring Twenties* (October 1939) opens with a vigorous montage sequence taking us back to World War I, with a hard-boiled narrator rapping out reports on the period. Later montages of social changes are accompanied by the same narrator. An article about *Stanley and Livingstone* and *The Roaring Twenties* noted that the voice-over device, borrowed from documentary short subjects, was "being injected into several scripts."[10]

Not surprisingly, several films in the 1940–41 flashback cycle exemplify the new possibilities of voice-over commentary. Later films would rework the schemas they introduced: the to-camera address of *Our Town*, the interview-reminiscence frame of *Edison, the Man*, the crisis structure framing the flashbacks of *Kitty Foyle*, the multiple-narrator layout of *Citizen Kane* and *Lydia*. *Cheers for Miss Bishop* (1941) frames its life survey as a flashback with occasional autobiographical voice-overs, while *How Green Was My Valley* takes the format a step further by never fully showing us the reminiscing character in the present.[11]

TIME LAYERS VIA VOICE-OVER

Over the following years voice-over narration, in these formats and others, would appear in a great many films. An all-knowing external commenter like the one in the *Roaring Twenties* became particularly prominent in "semidocumentary" films of crime and international intrigue. Such a narrator could be very powerful. He (always a he) could roam widely across many locales, as at the beginning of *The Naked City* (1948). He could also, in *Confidence Girl* (1952), conjure up a replay that reveals the deception of a mind-reading act. Films also came to rely on individualized narrators—protagonists or secondary characters who carry us through the story action, often but not always in the flashback format.

Across the decade, the options became clearly codified. Preparing *Portrait of Jennie* (1949), the famously indecisive Selznick considered, in turn, using no narrator, using voice-over from a secondary character, and using an external, noncharacter narrator.[12] And the filmmaking menu expanded unpredictably. Screenwriter Daniel Mainwaring planned a voice-over commentary for *Out of the Past* (1947) that would be provided by a deaf-mute boy.[13] *Ringside* (1949), as we've seen, is narrated by a boxing ring and *Enchantment* (1948) by a house. *City That Never Sleeps* (1953) is narrated by the municipality of Chicago. As with other narrative trends, the competitive search for novelty pushed some filmmakers to extremes.

Today beginners are advised that voice-over narration is often a clumsy shortcut. "It takes," says screenwriting guru Robert McKee, "little talent and less effort to fill a sound track with explanation."[14] Yet 1940s filmmakers understood that the technique is budget-friendly and can add psychological resonance. A Columbia producer pointed this out:

> The added use of narration is a potent factor in cutting costs. Narrations, well done, are descriptions which vividly tell action and background and save valuable time and money which are expended in the customary production processes. We're merely coming back to the old way of telling a story, and by telling it in the first person we make the audience a part of the story.[15]

The Miniver Story is a good example of how a fairly ordinary film could, by 1950, use voice-over to enrich dramatic situations. This sequel to *Mrs. Miniver* (1942) traces the family's postwar recovery. The young daughter is infatuated with an older, married man, while the father, Clem, hopes to start a new life by moving the family to Brazil. The chief dramatic pressure comes from the fact that Kay, the mother, conceals her fatal disease. Passing off spells of dizziness as fatigue, she tries to steer Judy toward a more appropriate mate and to rebuild Clem's faith in England's recovery. After Kay's death, the family is united and remains in their beloved home.

This straightforward story is wrapped in a crossweave of narrational devices. A voice-over is provided by Clem, who disarmingly announces at the start, "This is Kay's story." During his initial exposition ("I'd like to tell you about her . . .") we see Kay entering a doctor's office, but Clem's commentary doesn't explain this action. Splitting from Clem's account, the scene functions as a brief foreshadowing; it will be forty-five minutes before our suspicions about her fatal illness are confirmed.

Attaching us to Kay's activities but feeding us Clem's voice-over, the opening scenes show her in London at the moment Churchill announces the German surrender. She returns to the village and says farewell to the American officer, a married man she had befriended. He has fallen in love with her but recognizes that she's loyal to Clem, who is still in Europe.

How does Clem's commentary know all this? In a novel, his first-person account would be justified through a traditional device such as letters from Kay, or her full-blown recounting over tea. Here a simple early line suffices: "Later, when Kay told me how it all began . . ." So great is the power of visible action—Fitzgerald's "*seeing* is believing"—that we don't question Clem's access to everything. The Hollywood default, as we've seen with flashbacks, is objective and "limited omniscient" presentation, even for tales that purportedly are filtered through characters' recollection or recounting. So, for instance, we can be "within" Clem's narrational block but see Kay collapse while he's out of sight in the bathroom, prattling and oblivious.

On the night of Clem's homecoming from the war, his voice-

over revises his earlier promise. "This is Kay's story, not mine, but I have to tell it through my eyes, not hers. I don't think there's very much difference." Indeed not. The central part of the film will become fairly wide ranging, sometimes attached to Clem but mostly presenting Kay's efforts to put the family's future right. Clem's voice-over largely drops out.

By the time of the dance celebrating a year of peace, all the story problems are reconciled. Judy has taken up with a local boy, and Clem has resolved to stay in England. Only now does Kay tell Clem she has just a few months to live. The scene of her confession is a good example of the textural density of 1940s narration.[16]

It proceeds in layers. Kay and Clem have withdrawn to a bridge in the garden while the dance goes on inside. The party music, a languid piano version of "Old Man River," prods Clem to ask if she remembers seeing *Showboat* together back in 1928. As they walk to the pavilion he reflects on the passage of time and says they're like the song: "We just keep rolling along." Taking his hand, she declares that if they take a holiday, she wants to be home for autumn. "And I won't be here for the spring." Track in on their hands.

> Clem's voice-over: *She gripped my hands—gripped them tight till it hurt. And then she told me.*
>
> Clem's cigarette drops from his fingers. Cut to their reflection in the pool. The cigarette lands there and makes ripples. Track back as Clem's voice-over continues: *While the music played, and the moon shone, and Old Man River, he just went rolling along.*
>
> The camera tracks further back from the water, revealing the reflected lanterns, and strings and woodwinds pick up the tune. Clem's voice-over: *Kay told me that night that when the autumn was gone, she'd be gone too. I heard her voice, I knew what she was saying, but standing there I seemed aware of more absurd, irrelevant things. An owl hooting on the other side of the water. Somewhere inside, on the dance floor, the tinkle of glass. One of the little fairy lanterns overhead flickering on and off.*

As Clem's commentary concludes ("She stopped speaking and looked up at me, waiting"), the camera mimics his words by tilting up to show them, in long shot, above the water. The offscreen dance music ends, and we cut to a two-shot showing a stunned Clem, and a new piano theme starts ("The Girl That I Marry"). Kay puts her hand on his arm. "I felt a touch on my sleeve and then her voice." She speaks: "The last dance, Clem." She leads him back to the party.

Clem's voice-over reflects: "I remember thinking, 'They're playing that theme from *Annie Get Your Gun*.'" Kay leads Clem into the dance as his voice-over muses, "Strange how music bridges the years. *Showboat–Annie Get Your Gun*. Twenty years of married life." The camera cranes back as the couple dance in rapt communion.

From the start the scene has pointed to two time periods, 1928 and 1948. When the commentary interjects itself, we get both Clem's immediate reaction to Kay's news and his later appraisal of it in our present. The conventionally romantic imagery of lovers in a serene landscape is modified by Clem's ruminations. Replacing a close-up of his response, the long shot creates a sense of placid harmony consistent with Kay's tranquil acceptance of death.

Meanwhile, the imagery refuses for the most part to show us what Clem registers: the shining moon, the owl, tinkling glass at the party, the pool recalling the rolling river. The purely verbal details expand the scene without distracting from the cumulative power of the steadily widening view of the couple. Only the winking lantern reflected in the water reinforces Clem's impressionistic stream of thought, and this audiovisual matchup suggests a life flickering its last. The commentary is layered over the imagery, which is already enhanced by the offscreen tunes evoking time's passage and a marriage to an ideal woman.[17]

This sequence shows how 1940s voice-over could enhance a scene through dense image/sound patterning and quick shifts between present and past, objective and subjective information. The saturation is distinctly cinematic, impossible to achieve on the page or the stage or the airwaves. *The Miniver Story* sequence creates a lyrical flow that makes the conventional melodramatic

situation vivid and moving. In Eugene Vale's terms, the handling of information "makes the story more interesting than it actually is."

THE CINEMATIC ORATORIO

What constraints does the filmmaker accept in using voice-over commentary? Surprisingly few.

We might be tempted to think the voice is speaking to somebody, as in real-life communication. Therefore the filmmaker would be obliged to show that there's a "listener" somewhere. That option is sometimes taken, as when Lisa in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948) writes to the roué Stefan. But many voice-over narrators aren't speaking to anyone in particular. Similarly, the narrator of a novel might not be addressing anyone, not even Dear Reader. The voice, whether it belongs to a character or to an external narrator, functions primarily to give us a particular angle of access to the story world and the plot.

Some theorists of film narrative argue that the presence of a narrator logically requires the presence of a receiver or "narratee." Even if such a figure isn't signaled by the film, it's said to be there as a ghostly presence and a logical necessity. I think this view is mistaken. Many literary narrators don't posit anyone reading or listening to the text. And in any case, cinematic narrative *mimics pieces* of the sender-message-receiver chain for particular effects, and 1940s filmmakers understood this.

Just as a character's flashback may include actions she didn't witness, so a narrator need not have an interlocutor. Clem Miniver isn't speaking to any particular entity when he recalls his wife's last years. We accept that his recounting cues us to construct the story in particular ways. This creative choice shapes and colors information in a way that other choices wouldn't. We would have a different attitude if the story were presented chronologically and without his commentary. Narrative, in other words, is opportunistic, protean, and promiscuous. It's governed not by logical constraints, but by psychological ones.[18]

So, for instance, the impersonal tough-guy voices introducing urban crime films like *The House on 92nd Street* (1945), *13 Rue*

Madeleine (1947), and *Homicide* (1949) aren't reporting to anyone in the story world, or even to us outside it. (How could they communicate with us? They don't exist in our world.) Similarly, Huw Morgan has no discernible listeners in any realm; he functions simply to present story information in a quasi-personal way. Emily and the Stage Manager in *Our Town* may seem to be talking to us, but we know they're not. They're delivery devices in appealing human shape.

If Hollywood narration were a tidy sender/receiver communication, we would expect to find boxes within boxes. An external voice might frame the film, opening and closing it with all-knowing efficiency. Character narrators would take their turns, launching and rounding off embedded episodes. As in literature, those first-person narrators would confine themselves wholly to what they witnessed or could plausibly know.

We sometimes do find such neatly symmetrical framing. *A Walk in the Sun* (1946) starts with a book in which each major soldier is introduced in freeze-frames, followed by a song about the servicemen's daylong battle. At the film's end the song returns, and then the book, which displays a text of the final lyrics. Within the story world, there's another symmetrical narration: a soldier who, at both beginning and end, rehearses a letter he'll write to his sister.

But such boxed and bookended voice-over narration is rare. *To Be or Not to Be* (1942) opens with a voice-over introducing a flashback gag, but there's no corresponding voice at the end. Any expectation that we'll return to Huw Morgan in the present, leaving his no-longer-green valley, is defeated when the onscreen action loops back to stylized versions of images we've witnessed in the past. The screenplay for *Guest in the House* (1944) balanced the narrator's opening situation with a firmly resolved finale, but the released version never returns to the narrator or her voice.

Filmmakers seemed to assume, probably rightly, that by the end viewers would have forgotten an opening voice-over. And adding a one-off voice-over at the start of a film could be handy if, late in production, the story's exposition seemed to need more spelling out. This pragmatic choice reaffirms the fluidity of cinematic narration, which seizes on momentary advantages and

may ignore overall consistency. Moreover, a frame that involves a secondary character, like the one in *Guest in the House*, might provide a weak concluding note. Again we see the priority of plot over consistent viewpoint; a striking wrap-up, as with *Rebecca*'s monogrammed pillow engulfed in flames, may be worth more than tidy symmetry.

Even when a frame returns at the end, it needn't be perfectly symmetrical. *Action in the North Atlantic* (1943) starts with a character's voice-over and ends with an FDR speech praising the merchant marine. The initial voice-over of *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) comes from Betsy, the protagonist; at the end, the voice of a black man takes over the narrating duties. In several films we'll find a concluding narration that offers a formal parallel with the opening, though in a different mode or register.

Hold Back the Dawn, one of those ambitious flashback films from 1941, starts with an odd introductory printed title. We're told that a man came to the Paramount studio with an extraordinary tale. Slipping into a sound stage, he begged director Mitchell Leisen (the director of our film) to listen to his story. The story unfolds as a flashback garnished with the intruder's voice-over. It ends unresolved, and back in the present the intruder is forced out. Then comes a new voice-over passage in which an external narrator announces that "the real ending" took place later. An epilogue plays out a pleasant conclusion. In effect, the external narration of the opening title is preserved in the concluding voice-over (spoken by Leisen, though he's not identified).

The approximate symmetry in *Hold Back the Dawn* seems aimed at lightening what could have been a grim drama. Something more poignant takes place in *I Remember Mama* (1948). Katrin, the eldest daughter, reads her memoir aloud as she sits before her mirror (fig. 6.1). The reflection concisely suggests both address to herself and slantwise confession to us. In the film's epilogue, Katrin is reading to the entire family (fig. 6.2). Thanks to the flashback we know all of them, so we can appreciate how she has integrated them into her writing. Here she's reading only one of her stories, the first to be accepted for publication. This asymmetrical frame ends the film with an image of her emerging maturity as a writer. Her inspiration for the book is the shared ex-

6.1. *I Remember Mama* (1948): As Katrin recites the opening of her book, she sees herself in her mirror, writing.

6.2. The isolated self-absorption of the opening frame is counterweighted by a communal situation at the film's end, with Katrin reading her first published story to her family.

6.3. Katrin's story contains the lines she recited at the start, but in the final image of Mama at the window, Katrin's table reading becomes an intimate voice-over addressed to us.

perience of domestic love. Yet the original frame is evoked on the sound track, concisely closing the flashback (fig. 6.3).

The absence of framing voice-overs exemplifies Hollywood's opportunistic use of narrating voices. For example, characters in the story world may abruptly step outside it. Their voices can come forward with the presence of an external authority, as the Stage Manager does in *Our Town*. *The Southerner* (1945) shows the sharecropper family finding the dilapidated cabin they've been given. The disconsolate conversation of husband and wife is heard over a free-roaming tour of the house while they stand outside. The close miking of their voices makes them seem more like musing narrators than offscreen characters.

The *Southerner* passage dwells on the moment to define what the young couple are up against, but "floating" voice-over is more often used for concise backstory. In *The Killers* (1946) an insur-

ance executive reads aloud a newspaper story about a payroll theft. As we watch a flashback to the heist, his offscreen voice gains the immediacy of an impersonal narrator's. The opening of *City for Conquest* (1940) introduces us to the Old Timer, a genial bum who rhapsodizes about the teeming variety of life in New York City. He never quite looks at the camera, but as he speaks we get a montage of life in the big city illustrating his monologue. He becomes a quasi-external narrator, a role enhanced because he's played by Frank Craven, Stage Manager of *Our Town* on both stage and screen.

Sometimes we must ask, Who's narrating? A crisp male voice introduces *Slattery's Hurricane* (1949) by explaining the need to monitor hurricanes. The voice turns out to belong to a commanding officer in the film, but nothing is made of this, and the narration doesn't return at the close.[19] The impersonal, drily factual voice at the start of *Red Ball Express* (1952) drops out for forty minutes before returning as the musing of a character reflecting on the action; and that's the last we hear of him.

More drastically, it's surprising to find a hard-boiled tale like *Kiss of Death* (1947) narrated by an unidentified woman with unusual access to the heart and mind of a crook trying to go straight. Not until about half an hour into the film does she enter the action and acquire a name. *Nora Prentiss* (1947) delays revealing its narrator, a murder suspect who refuses to speak to the police. Composition and lighting conceal his face from us, but we hear his inner monologue. Not until the courtroom climax do we learn his identity.

A different sort of uncertainty about the narrator crops up in *Roughly Speaking* (1945). The film traces the life of an accomplished wife, mother, and entrepreneur, and at various points she narrates the action we see. The first time her voice comes in is when she tells of the family's financial collapse after her father's death. In that passage of voice-over, it's not the adult who speaks, but the girl. The device is illogical, given that the child narrates in the past tense, but it poses no problems for our comprehension, and hearing our protagonist at an early stage of life makes her saga more vivid.

A similar ventriloquism is at work in the revival of the "nar-

ratage" technique of *The Power and the Glory*. Filmmakers took advantage of the new precision of rerecording to let narrators lip-synch with dialogue in the past. In *The Gay Sisters* (1942), Fiona speaks in the flashback, but we hear her voice as it is in the present. *My Life with Caroline* makes a wife's suitor speak with the voice of the husband who's narrating the flashback.

There's the possibility of collaborative voice-overs too. *So Proudly We Hail* (1943) recruits several army nurses to tell what drove their leader to her present catatonic state. At first the narrators are assigned to distinct sequences, but during a montage passage the sound track weaves together different voice-overs, with women freely chiming in. This is cinema's counterpart to the choral effects explored in radio drama of the period.

A 1940s voice-over film, then, may present a sort of audio-visual oratorio with soloists, sometimes unidentified, rising and subsiding as the need arises. Just as a flashback triggered by character memory need not respect what the character actually knew or witnessed, so a voice-over narrator may gracefully slip in or drop out.

DEAD MAN TALKING

The narrator is an essentially artificial figure, and two strategies of 1940s films emphasize this quality. One strategy makes the character face the camera and address us. This option was rare in 1930s fiction films. There, apart from the master of ceremonies who appears in a revue musical, the to-camera narrator is limited, as far as I know, to comic efforts to break the fourth wall. The most memorable examples are the asides of Groucho Marx and Maurice Chevalier's ooh-la-la commentary in *One Hour with You* (1932).

The 1940 film of *Our Town* used to-camera address for dramatic purposes, as the stage production had done. Other projects flirted with the possibility. Welles's 1939 treatment for *Heart of Darkness* planned to have the camera represent Marlow so that the other characters would narrate their portions of the tale in direct address. Selznick considered ending *Gone with the Wind* (1940) with Scarlett addressing a soliloquy to the viewer.[20]

6.4. The grotesque narrator of the *Inner Sanctum* series introduces *Calling Dr. Death* (1943).

Mitchell Leisen's voice-over introducing the epilogue of *Hold Back the Dawn* was originally scripted to show him talking to the camera.[21] But after *Our Town* the first mainstream release to put the strategy on the screen seems to have been *My Life with Caroline*, another 1941 experiment. Its central flashback is launched by a jaundiced husband addressing us ("I'll explain it all to you in a minute"). When the action finally returns to the present, he turns away from us and reenters the story world.

Thereafter the strategy appears in both comedy and drama. It was a signature of the 1943–45 *Inner Sanctum* series (fig. 6.4). Many films that open with a direct address never return to it as a closing frame (*Dead Man's Walk*, 1943; *No More Vices*, 1948). *Words and Music* (1948) starts with an actor in the MGM studio introducing the film but with an equivocal line ("I'm Richard Rogers") slipping him into the role he plays; at the end the actor doesn't reappear, but his voice-over returns.

Other films make the device more symmetrical. We get a stark direct address in *Edward, My Son* (1948), another usage based on the format of the original stage play: the central figure advances out of a dark void to confess how he destroyed his son's life. Secondary characters become confiding *raisonneurs*, in a comic vein in *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1948) and in a more purely dramatic one in *Young Man with a Horn* (1950). In a powerful slippage, witnesses in a war crimes trial seem at moments to be addressing us rather than people in the courtroom (*None Shall Escape*, 1943).

Even more frankly contrived than the to-camera narrator is a

second piece of artifice: the dead narrator. Posthumous narration can be motivated as letters (*Letter from an Unknown Woman*) or diary entries (Thatcher's journal in *Citizen Kane*). Similarly, *Heaven Can Wait* (1943) gives us a dead man chronicling episodes from his life for an inquisitive official in the afterlife. The more flagrant cases, though, involve dead narrators who recount the entire film in voice-over, aiming their account not at other characters in the story, but at us. The prototype is *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), in which Joe Gillis is introduced floating facedown in a swimming pool. (An earlier script makes him tell his story rising from a morgue slab and addressing the camera.)[22] In this and other cases, knowing the protagonist is dead at the start makes us watch for clues to how he or she will die.

Posthumous narrators will never stay buried. In literature, Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* (1915) presents the ruminations of the town dead, in the manner of the cemetery climax of *Our Town*. Wilfred Owen's poetic monologue "Strange Meeting" (1918) takes us to soldiers reuniting in hell, ending with the poignant line, "Let us sleep now." Addie Bundren, the dead mother of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930), narrates portions of the novel from her coffin. In a sort of Faulkner pastiche, Kenneth Fearing's mystery novel *Dagger of the Mind* (1941) includes a chapter narrated by a man who's been murdered. Radio drama also included voices from the beyond; examples are "Ghost Ship" (1940), with a victim recounting his own murder, and Norman Corwin's "Untitled" (1944), which reveals the narrator to be a dead soldier. The most famous broadcast example was probably Lucille Fletcher's "The Hitch-Hiker" (1941). On the stage, Ben Hecht's short-lived *Lily of the Valley* (1942) anticipated Wilder's plan for *Sunset Boulevard* by presenting corpses in a morgue summing up their lives.[23]

In film, World War II brings forth the prospect of dead servicemen returning to tell their tales. "I am Matthew Macauley," says a face superimposed over imagery of radiant clouds (fig. 6.5). "I have been dead for two years. But so much of me is still living that I know now that the end is only the beginning." This is indeed a beginning, of *The Human Comedy* (1943). Having died in the war, Matthew will guide us back to his hometown and his household's daily routines. His voice-over goes on to introduce his fam-

6.5–6.7. *The Human Comedy* (1943).

ily members, including son Marcus, on duty in the army. After a scene in which a spectral Matthew joins his wife at her household work (fig. 6.6), his voice discreetly retires, returning only twice before he and his now-dead soldier son watch the family welcome their new member, Marcus's pal Tobey (fig. 6.7). "You see, Marcus, the end is only a beginning." The address to us has become a piece of fatherly advice.

The dead narrator of *The Human Comedy* never intervenes in the action on earth, but an all-seeing intelligence exercises more authority in *The Seventh Cross* (1944).[24] Seven prisoners escape from a concentration camp. Fairly soon all but one are captured and executed on crosses planted in the yard, as an example to the inmates. The first one to be crucified is Ernst Wallau. His narration has already launched the film, and during the escape sequence he has rapidly introduced each of his comrades. After he is killed, his voice-over continues: "I was dead. I could see."

Wallau's commentary chiefly follows his friend George Heis-

ler, who manages to elude the Gestapo while the other escapees are caught and killed. Wallau's narration, after chronicling the fates of the other men, probes Heisler's state of mind. Wallau tells us what Heisler is thinking, guides us into his memory, notes things Heisler has forgotten, and even informs us what other characters will do in the future. Confronted with a numb, almost mute protagonist, we need the continuing commentary of Wallau to reveal Heisler's inner life.

Wallau is that rare voice-over narrator who flaunts his omniscience. Being dead, he has total access to our world and can witness anything happening there. Despite Wallau's godlike power, in good Hollywood tradition his narration chiefly attaches itself to Heisler. But here that restriction simply reflects Wallau's foreknowledge, signaled at the start, that only Heisler will survive. The question becomes how.

The answer comes through Wallau's goading Heisler to find faith in others. At the start Heisler is close to despair, and his flight stems from the sheer instinct to survive. At the film's midpoint, all his comrades have been killed, and Wallau's long-term escape plan has failed. Heisler can no longer mechanically follow his mentor's instructions. He must forge a new goal, seize the initiative, and trust people. He must learn what Wallau told him from the start: Germany still fosters traces of humanity.

As Heisler's hopes grow and his network of allies expands, Wallau's voice-over subsides. It reappears near the end, at the moment Heisler realizes how much he owes others. Heisler speaks of his debts, and Wallau murmurs in antiphony the names of those who have helped him, including people Heisler has never met. Now that Heisler has joined the struggle with full commitment, Wallau vanishes. "Goodbye, George Heisler. I can leave you now."

Naturally, a lot depends on the timing of information. If we learn at the start that the narrator is dead, as in *The Human Comedy* and *Scared to Death* (1947), a certain amount of the tale can seem foreordained. In other cases there can be a surprise. Radio plays, it seems, tended to reveal their dead narrators as a twist ending.[25] With less fanfare, a film can seem to "forget" the opening commentary, as we've seen with partly framed flashbacks.

The Gangster (1947) is initially narrated by the crooked protagonist, in voice-over without an explicit frame situation. As a result, we expect him to survive. Yet he dies in the course of the action. The filmmakers faced a problem: Return to the narration at the end or not? To revive his voice-over might suggest that he survives in some supernatural realm. Instead, in one of the approximate parallels we've already encountered, an impersonal external voice takes over to balance the opening.

Ghostly figures like Wallau and Matthew Macauley call to mind the nosy angels and spooks we'll meet later. These narrators also have counterparts in radio dramas like "Good Ghost" (1948) and the parodic mystery novel *Dead to the World* (1947), in which a dead detective reports his efforts to solve a case. Again, however, film's two-track presentation, image and sound, can offer a fluid layering not achievable in other media. The first half of *Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1948) consists of flashbacks recounted by the fortune-teller John Triton, who starts out as a fake but seems to acquire genuine precognition. So we're accustomed to his meditative voice-over when, at the climax, he's fatally shot. He has predicted how he'll die, and as a character in the scene reads his letter aloud to others, the camera pans over their reactions. Once the reader goes offscreen, Triton's soft voice seamlessly takes over the recitation, and when the camera pans back to his body, a touch of unearthly reverberation is added to his final words.

With the convention of the dead narrator in place, a film could flirt with the possibility that any voice we hear may have no living source. The opening credits of *Woman in Hiding* (1950) strongly suggest that a betrayed wife has been killed when her car plunges into a river. Her commentary rises up during a scene of the police dragging the river, and she seems to be mocking her husband from beyond the grave. Shortly we'll learn that the title is accurate; she escaped death. Her commentary is an internal monologue laid over action she's watching from a safe distance.

In the same year as *Woman in Hiding*, *Sunset Boulevard* gave us the real thing, a definitely deceased main character. If the film's technique seems less original coming after a procession of dead narrators, at least it can be credited with making the narrator the

protagonist. As happens so often in the 1940s, the originality of a noteworthy film stems from a switcheroo: a revision of a schema that was already in circulation, not only in film but in other media.

THE WEEKEND LAURA DIED

Occasionally filmmakers mix their voice-over options in dissonant ways. *Laura* (1944) is probably the most famous example.

Vera Caspary's original novel is divided principally into three first-person blocks recounted successively by bon vivant Waldo Lydecker, detective Mark McPherson, and magazine editor Laura Hunt. Early versions of the screenplay attempted to capture this tripartite layout through flashbacks and voice-overs. What happened to this structure, however, reveals a process we'll encounter elsewhere: fiddling with the film in postproduction yielded some disjunctive results.

Laura has apparently been murdered by a shotgun blast to the face. When the film starts, McPherson is calling on her mentor Waldo Lydecker, an effete columnist and radio commentator. Waldo's voice is heard recollecting the aftermath of Laura's death and describing McPherson's visit (fig. 6.8).

McPherson lets Waldo accompany him on his inquiries before the two go to dinner at the restaurant Laura loved (fig. 6.9). There, via flashbacks and voice-overs, Lydecker recounts Laura's rise in his social milieu. In a scene cut from the final film, there's an indication that Waldo's account is partly false—an early instance of a lying flashback.

The other characters' flashbacks were abandoned during production, so the rest of the film is rendered in the present.[26] At the end of the evening, when Waldo leaves, the camera lingers on McPherson, and we become attached to him for nearly all that follows (fig. 6.10). In screenplay drafts, the shot's holding on McPherson would have launched his voice-over narration. That would have constituted a block parallel to Waldo's. Without McPherson's block, Waldo's initial voice-over hangs open, apparently framing the whole film.

It would have been easy simply to cut that commentary and retain the opening camera movement revealing McPherson

6.8. *Laura* (1944): The opening, showing McPherson's curiosity about Waldo's clock while Waldo speaks to us: "I could watch him through the half-open door." A matching clock, we'll learn, is in Laura's apartment.

6.9. Waldo's more orthodox flashbacks to Laura's career are framed by his evening in the restaurant with McPherson.

6.10. After the restaurant scene, the narration attaches itself to McPherson. Originally, this shot would have initiated McPherson's voice-over.

browsing among Waldo's treasures, perhaps with some musical underscoring. After this, Waldo's restaurant flashbacks and voice-over narration would become neatly nested and perfectly conventional. Clearly, decision makers wanted to retain Waldo's ripe commentary to open the film; it has expository value, and it introduces an intriguing character.

But we don't hear that introductory voice again, so for the rest of the film we might take Waldo's remarks as akin to those that open *Rebecca* (1940) or *Flamingo Road* (1949). In these films and many others, a reminiscing character voice introduces the story action from an unspecified point in time and space and is never heard from again. But presumably that character survives the events of the film. When Waldo is shot down, we might have a situation like that of *The Gangster*, where the narrator is killed in

6.11. Waldo confronts Laura after his voice, on the radio, has finished a poem: "Our path . . . closes within a dream."

6.12. Waldo, fatally wounded: "Good-bye, Laura." Pan to . . .

6.13. . . . McPherson and Laura, leaving the shot . . .

6.14. . . as the camera tracks in on the shattered clock and we hear, very intimately, Waldo saying: "Good-bye, my love."

the course of the action he introduced, and the film forgets who started it all.

Instead, *Laura* takes the option that *The Gangster* avoided: it brings back the dead man's voice. It's already dissociated at the climax, when we hear Waldo's prerecorded radio broadcast as he comes in on Laura (fig. 6.11). After Waldo is shot down, there's a cut to McPherson and Laura leaving the frame (figs. 6.12 and 6.13). As the camera moves in on the shattered clock face, we hear, "Goodbye, Laura. Goodbye, my love" (fig. 6.14).

The effect is equivocal. The line might be taken as Waldo's dying words spoken offscreen, except that it is miked far more closely than his speech earlier in the scene. In its acoustic qualities, this unsituated sign-off balances the unsituated opening. But

it also raises the possibility that the dead Waldo has launched the whole story and now bids Laura farewell from that realm where defunct narrators dwell.

The opening does hint that something otherworldly is going on. A tart, suave voice wells up from sheer darkness, perhaps a noir equivalent to the cloudy eternity from which Matthew Macauley speaks in *The Human Comedy*. Yet for a dead narrator, Waldo is either badly informed or duplicitous. He speaks of "the weekend Laura died." But if he lived through the events of the film, he knows she did not die. Of course his fib helps the film mislead us; the first half presupposes that Laura was the victim. If we remember that an unused scene was going to reveal that his flashback recounted to McPherson contained lies, we may suspect that Waldo is as unreliable in death as he was in life.

Some of these inconsistencies apparently spring from late decisions in production. The original ending, as scripted and shot, lets Waldo survive. As he's led off to jail, he says, "Thank you for everything, my dear. . . . You're all I'll be thinking of—till Time stands still—for me. Goodbye, Laura." The speech was to be heard offscreen as the camera pans and holds on the clock.

Production head Darryl F. Zanuck was dissatisfied with this conclusion, so a new scene was filmed. In that version, Waldo is shot and dying. We see him speak the same lines, and only then does the camera pan to the clock. The released version, with Waldo's simpler, closely miked farewell heard over the shot of the clock, was evidently decided on still later.[27]

In sum, while presenting a haunting image—the clock was Waldo's gift to Laura, it was the hiding place of the shotgun, and the shattered face recalls the dead Diane Redfern—the sound track firmly reminds us of the opening. Do we have a dead narrator? Some cues are there, but they're sketchier than those in other films of the era. (For one thing, the narrator typically *tells* us he or she is dead.)

The unexplained return of Waldo's voice, now as gentle and intimate as in his radio recitation, has a surprising poignancy and serves as an eccentric, powerful revision of the dead narrator schema. *Laura*'s popularity may have encouraged later filmmakers to risk inconsistency for the sake of vivid immediate

effects. In the pressure to get a film finished and out the door, and to retain striking bits that may not completely make sense when put together, Hollywood filmmakers can innovate by accident.

Hollywood filmmakers of the forties became acutely aware of the ways they could regulate the "what they didn't know was" factor. Omniscient narration and restricted narration, ellipses and misleading hooks, confessional and reportorial voice-overs—all were tools for creating curiosity about the past, suspense about the future, and surprise in the moment. These tools defined the fluctuating range of knowledge that the ongoing film presents.

But alongside range of knowledge there's also the matter of *depth*, of how far narration plunges into characters' mental lives. With voice-overs like those issuing from Clem Miniver and Waldo Lydecker, we're brought inside the the characters' consciousness. Less obviously, a great many films enhance their moments of restriction with probes into what a character sees and hears, or thinks or imagines or dreams. Bursts of intense subjectivity became as central to 1940s cinematic storytelling as flashbacks and voice-over.

INTERLUDE

Remaking Middlebrow Modernism

TECHNIQUE SWAPPING IS ENDEMIC TO THE MEDIA MIX, AND the traffic among film, fiction, radio, and the stage was constant in the 1940s. What I've called middlebrow modernism, that selective blend of techniques from "well-made" fiction and the avant-garde, was a valuable model for filmmakers. But what happens when Hollywood tries to adapt a work in that mildly modernist vein?

Sometimes filmmakers iron out the bumps and twists, fitting somewhat innovative source material into the contours of classical studio storytelling. This happened, I think, with one of the most celebrated plays in American theater. Alternatively, the filmmakers might be lured into experiment themselves—preserving the source work's techniques, or finding equivalents, or taking things in a fresh direction. A sturdy English novel, well received at the time but largely forgotten now, offers an example.

FROM SCREEN TO STAGE TO SCREEN

In the bare stage of *Our Town* (1938) and the "cinematic" machinery of *Allegro* (1948), Broadway tried to mimic the fluidity and speed of Hollywood movies—particularly when it came to representing characters' inner lives. Nowhere was this tendency more

evident than in several productions designed by Jo Mielziner: *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Summer and Smoke* (1948), and *Death of a Salesman* (1949). In these quasi-filmic productions, scenes could be linked by lighting changes or by characters' moving to a distinct zone of the set. Transparent walls could reveal playing spaces or wrap them in darkness. The "dream play" *The Glass Menagerie* featured a narrator, flashbacks, and other devices. A British critic observed that the new playwrights apparently had discovered that Broadway audiences would rather be in the cinema, "and even at the cinema we have begun to groan when the flashbacks start."[1]

The original *Death of a Salesman* production is indebted to movie structure and technique. The two acts that sum up Willy Loman's last twenty-four hours present his attempt to give up traveling, get a desk job and reconcile with his son Biff, who has failed to live up to Willy's dreams for him. These domestic crises frame scenes presenting Willy's mental life. We witness better days that Willy shared with his sons, as well as his philandering with a woman on the road, along with fantasy projections of his prosperous brother Ben offering advice.

Thanks to new stage techniques, these embedded scenes flow swiftly into and out of the present-time action in a way reminiscent of film flashbacks. Lighting cues and music underscore the shifts. There are hooks between episodes, as when the laughter of Willy's wife Linda prompts his memory of the laughing Woman in his past. The present even goes on hold when Willy passes into memory or fantasy; he returns to the same situation he left. At first glance the play seems akin to the plunges into mental subjectivity familiar from 1940s films.

Arthur Miller was cautious about admitting the debt his play owed to film, but Mielziner designed the production to enable director Elia Kazan to use "some of the best cinematic techniques."[2] Mielziner created a stylized set of the Loman home with rooms at different levels, so that the staging could intercut scenes in different places. Throughout the 1940s playwrights had explored various ways of signaling flashbacks and fantasy episodes.[3] For *Salesman*, scenes set in the past were played on the forestage. Willy steps to it when remembering, and his phantasmic brother Ben

appears there.[4] Miller rewrote the play to suit Mielziner's design concept.[5]

What would set *Salesman* off from other productions that mimicked film? Miller claimed he was exploring character subjectivity in two uncommon ways. Perhaps to distinguish his play from the other time-shifting plays of recent years, he insisted that the episodes from Willy's past were not flashbacks.[6] A flashback, he suggested, is typically objective and expository. It presents actual events, and its purpose is to clarify the sources of present action. Miller sought a deeper subjectivity in his memory episodes, which he and Kazan called daydreams. Past episodes of Willy with his sons or with the Woman are colored by Willy's immediate emotions. Willy's despair after a confrontation with Biff leads him to idealize his past relations with his boys, as in the scene of polishing the family car. Miller claimed to seek a deeper subjectivity than would be found in orthodox drama and film, with their sharp distinctions between memory and fantasy. Yet the pervasive subjectivity wouldn't teeter into expressionism, which tends to present purely imaginary events.

Miller's second aim, he claimed, was to present the past as simultaneous with the present. "Everything exists together and at the same time within us."[7] Talking with a friend, you may suddenly recall something in your life, but you remain in the moment and keep talking; you dwell in both past and present.[8] Willy had to be shown as both drifting into daydream and still actively responding to his wife, sons, and family friends.

Kazan's notes sum up the aim: "*None of these dream-figures are actually in the past!* They are as much in the present. They are as Willy needs to think of them for his own reasons of personal dignity, self-esteem, etc."[9] The strategy stems from classic early modernism. *Salesman* seeks to convey the subjectively tinted consciousness we find in Conrad and James, while floating among several time periods à la Proust. Willy becomes an unreliable narrator of past happenings; they become fleeting events in his mind, reflecting his moods of the moment.

The problem of conveying these episodes became sharpened when ambitious producer Stanley Kramer bought the rights to the play. How to turn this filmic play into a film? "We now had the

opportunity," director László Benedek remarked, ". . . to employ the full scope of the screen medium in the telling of a story that was so extraordinarily cinematic by its own nature."[10]

Benedek could simply have filmed the stage production, but that wasn't considered a creative solution. Instead, he agreed in principle with Miller: the insertions wouldn't be flashbacks in the normal sense, and each would have to preserve Willy's immediate moment. "The past keeps flowing into the present, bringing its scenes and its characters with it—and sometimes we shall see both past and present simultaneously."[11] The problem was that the play's baseline reality was already highly stylized, thanks to the decorative house Mielziner prepared. By contrast, Benedek believed that cinema "demanded real sets, furnishings, and props." As with the film version of *Our Town*, a purely abstract or minimal theatricality wasn't an option.[12] Moreover, Benedek decided that because Willy perceived his fantasies as overpoweringly real, there should be no gauzes or special lenses to convey them. Memory, fantasy, and present reality would all be equally realistic, in standard Hollywood manner.

Within the quasi-realistic setting, Benedek sought some equivalents to the play's shifts between levels. Often, within a single shot, Willy passes from the present to the past. A panning movement follows him from his kitchen into an adjacent space representing the Boston hotel room where he meets the Woman. Brother Ben first materializes in the distance, as if coming from a tunnel bored in the parlor wall. On the subway platform Willy passes among a crowd before Ben comes into the frame; during their dialogue, we see no other passengers (fig. RMM.1). Benedek explained that the film shifts from straightforward realism to periods that "suspend" normal life.[13]

Miller condemned the result. He complained that straying too often from the Loman house made the action diffuse. He thought that Willy's imagined episodes were too realistically rendered (presumably in contrast with the original forestage scenes) and that Benedek did not preserve the play's simultaneity of past and present. Panning shots like the one in the kitchen simply replaced one moment with another rather than fusing them. Those shots that tried to absorb Willy's flights within a realistic locale

RMM.1. *Death of a Salesman* (1949): As Willy rushes to plead with Ben, they stride through realistic subway corridors, but the absence of other commuters suggests the suspension of action in the setting.

relied too much on close-ups of the actors, minimizing the surroundings. The film failed at "keeping the past constantly alive."[14]

To be fair, the qualities Miller finds lacking are hard to convey on film. And were they apparent in the original stage production? Several press reviews suggest that critics didn't detect that the memories were distorted by Willy's momentary feelings.[15] Moreover, by setting the memory episodes on the forestage, Mielziner's production design worked against that integration of present and past that Miller claimed to want. The staging created a split between "real life" and "mental life" that would be hard for the audience to overcome.

Accordingly, I suspect that most playgoers took the excursions into the past as straightforward flashbacks, while they understood brother Ben's interjections as wilder fantasies, dramatizations of things Ben had told Willy on various occasions. The same effect, it seems to me, arises from Benedek's film. It doesn't coax us to blur the boundaries between memory and fantasy. On the whole it looks like any ambitious 1940s time-shifting representation of inner life. Still, in its effort to supply equivalents for the mildly modernist bent of the play, *Death of a Salesman* cultivated some isolated subjective techniques—pan shots across eras, tricks of perspective, suspended action during imaginary scenes—that constituted minority options in 1940s Hollywood.

FUGUE INTO FLASHBACKS

Novelist Rumer Godden is best known to cinephiles as the author of *Black Narcissus* and *The River*, both turned into extraordinary

films. Her *Take Three Tenses: A Fugue in Time* (1945) seems to me an exemplary case of ambitious middlebrow modernism.

The novel presents a family saga spread across generations. There are Griselda and John Dane, their children, and a younger generation coming of age during World War II. The center of consciousness is Sir Roland, the now elderly son of Griselda and John. He grew to love the family's adopted daughter Lark, but he lacked the courage to run off with her. Now his brother's daughter, also called Griselda, has been sent to London during the Blitzkrieg. There, in the family home she shares with Roland, she meets Lark's son, Pax.

The novel's story could have been told in linear fashion, generation by generation. Another option was the framed-flashback manner of the film *Forever and a Day* (1943), which starts in the present and traces the family history chronologically through a young woman's account. But like Arthur Miller, Godden embraces the idea that time "is not consecutive, divided into past, present, and future, but that these are all co-existent if only we could see it."[16] She accordingly adopts several modernist devices, making them vivid and comprehensible thanks to the generational format.

The novel's plot zigzags among several periods: the marriage of John and his frail wife Griselda; the growth of their children Roland, Pelham, and Selina, along with the foundling Lark; their young adulthood; and the Blitzkrieg period that constitutes the present frame of the action. In addition, perhaps in the spirit of Faulkner, the central male Roland is given different names at different stages. He's Rolly as a child, Rollo as a young man, and Rolls as an old man.

To complicate matters, Godden plays with verbal texture. The story's present-time action during the World War II scenes is given in the standard past tense, but the earlier periods are chiefly rendered in forms of the *present* tense.[17] Accordingly, some passages jump from era to era.

> Proutie took it up to Rolls in his dressing room, where Rolls was sitting.
>
> "The post, Mr. Rolls."

"Go away," said Rolls. "Leave me alone."

Proutie put the letter on the table at Rolls' elbow and went away.

Years before there is another letter, a letter written by Rolls in answer to many letters of Selina's.

She reads it in her room sitting in the blue-and-white armchair on which this afternoon, dressing to have tea with Pax, after she had been asleep, Grizel tossed down her pyjamas and left, standing by it on the rug, a pair of swansdown slippers that she called her "scuffs."

Selina as a girl has a swansdown muff, dyed violet with a rose in it, but she keeps it tidily in tissue paper in the cupboard; she does not throw her things about nor leave them on the floor. As she reads Rolls's letter, Selina is not a girl; she is an elderly woman and that day she feels old. *You ask me, Lena, why I don't come home. That is a question that is rather difficult to answer. I seem to have a distaste for the house*.[18]

The device is reminiscent, again, of Faulkner, but Godden signals the time shifts more unequivocally than Faulkner does in, say, *Absalom, Absalom!* The letter is delivered to Rollo in the present, and we're told that Selina was an old woman when she got another letter "years before." Then the prose glides back to her as a girl, reading the letter (in the chair Grizel uses in the present). The shifts from past to present are also marked by emblematic objects that lead us stepwise through time. It's as if Godden were mimicking Hollywood hooks, dissolving from one image to another (letter to letter, slippers to muff).

Like *Death of a Salesman*'s original production, *Take Three Tenses* centers on the family home. Godden acknowledges as much in the book's opening lines: "The house, it seems, is more important than the characters. 'In me you exist,' says the house."[19] There follows a past-tense account of the elderly Rollo's learning that his family's lease on 99 Wilshire Court is up. Then we have a several-page tour, in the present tense, of the house from top to bottom. It's launched by this sentence: "In the house the past is present."

Godden takes literally the house's claim that "in me you

exist." Not only does she give the house an intermittent voice, she confines all the directly presented action to the building. What happens outside, we learn through conversational reports. At the book's end the opening tour is echoed in miniature. There various lines of dialogue from all periods mingle, and the narration insists that the house will endure "in its tickings, its rustlings, its creakings." The voice concludes, "In me you exist." So the house, past, present, and future, absorbs all the dramas played out in it.

The sovereignty of domestic structure is amplified by the novel's chapter structure, which, after an initial "Inventory," presents "Morning," "Noon," "Four O'Clock," "Evening," and "Night." The headings assemble only scenes taking place at the named time of day, though the scenes are gathered freely from across many years. One lunch consists of three lunches folded together. The fugal voices come together at these nodal points. Once again, the house sets the rules, the household routines being more important than a chronological or causally driven time scheme.

Take Three Tenses provides a challenge for Hollywood's narrative norms—hopscotching through time, organizing chunks of action not through causality but by space and household routine, and staying firmly within a single building over decades. Like *Kitty Foyle*, the film that resulted from the adaptation process, *Enchantment* (1948), fits the story action into a more familiar classical framework. But it also explores some unexpected cinematic options suggested by Godden's experiments.

Godden's book depends on parallels among generations, and this idea is retained in the film. But the film simplifies the story by eliminating the oldest generation, that of Griselda and John. The film's action plays out in only two eras, offering a turn-of-the century story of love and jealousy within the Dane family and a tale of awkward courtship set during the Blitz. In addition, the "fugal" structure of Godden's book is sacrificed for a tidier alternation of blocks of scenes: six in the present, five in the past.

In the Edwardian-era story, the widower John Dane adopts Lark, an orphan girl. After his death, the eldest daughter Selina rules the house, coddling her brothers Pelham and Rollo but treating Lark as a servant. Once they have grown, both men come to love Lark, and she reciprocates Rollo's love. Selina blocks their

union through several stratagems, relying partly on Rollo's reluctance to challenge her, and Lark leaves to marry an Italian count. She becomes the lost love of Rollo's life.

An old bachelor, Rollo lives in the family home until his grandniece Grizel arrives from America, posted to help the British war effort. Grumbling at first, Rollo eventually comes to enjoy having Grizel in the house, especially when she attracts the attentions of a Canadian flyer, Pax. She fends him off, on the grounds that she's already been hurt in love and doesn't want to risk it again. At the climax, as a bombardment begins, Rollo urges Grizel to go to Pax. He says, acknowledging his wasted life, that if she loves him, she mustn't wait a moment; things can change in an instant.

Godden's novel highlights the generational parallels by immediate, fine-grained juxtapositions of the sort we've seen in the letters/slippers passage. Chronology gets fractured in the process. At one point *Enchantment* does something similar, interrupting a shot of Rollo the young officer striding down the street with a dissolve to Pax on his way to Grizel. Normally, though, the film spaces out the parallels, letting them arise out of the aligned blocks of action. The child Lark's entry into the household is followed by Grizel's arrival during the Blitz. Rollo's departure for the army is paralleled in the present by Pax's assignment to overseas duty. In the past Rollo brings Lark a necklace; in the present, Pax brings Grizel chocolate.

The big scene of Rollo's losing Lark to the count is followed immediately by the climax in the present, when Pax declares his love, Rollo advises Grizel to follow him, and the house is assailed by Nazi bombardment. The parallels are likewise highlighted by motifs, chiefly the necklace that Rollo gave Lark as a pledge of love. She returned it when she fled the family home, but after he has come to love his great-niece, he gives it to her as a token of her happiness. "She wore it one night. You'll wear it a lifetime."

Acting as *raisonneur*, Rollo articulates the parallels between the two generations. He sees Grizel on the verge of making his mistake. "Don't stop to bargain for happiness." Grizel races out and finds Pax as the Blitz begins. She achieves the happiness that Rollo foolishly lost. Back at the house, Rollo is killed in the bombardment. As ever in classical construction, parallels are subordi-

nate to the forward drive of cause and effect. Still, *Enchantment*'s structure and explicit dialogue highlight parallels to an unusual degree.

It would be very difficult to find cinematic equivalents for Godden's play of tenses, but the film's transitions strive for something like a sense of her "co-existing past and present." Anticipating the single-take time shifts of *Death of a Salesman*, a shot may link two periods. Typically these passages highlight enduring parts of the house. Old Rollo has grudgingly let Grizel stay in Selina's bedroom. While Rollo says, in an auditory flashback, "There's no such thing as an empty room," we see Grizel at the dressing table. The clock stops, and as she puts it up to her ear, she looks screen right. The camera pans to the door, with a maid calling, "Miss Selina," and then pans back to show Selina as an adolescent at the dressing table. The parallel renders Grizel, during her first night in the house, as similar to Lark, who as a child spent her first night in Selina's room.

Nearly all of these single-shot transitions pivot on items that have remained in the house over the years: a clock, a chandelier, the central staircase. These transitions resemble passages in Godden's novel that use furnishings to tie together scenes in different periods, as with the swansdown items in the letter passage. If *Take Three Tenses* relies on the logic of Hollywood hooks, in the film the hooks, single-shot or not, become imbued with emotional significance (figs. RMM.2–RMM.5).

In capturing the persistent presence of the house in the novel, the film tries something far more daring than anything in the screen version of *Death of a Salesman*. *Enchantment* lets the house talk.

As the film opens, the camera approaches 99 Wilshire Court and the house introduces itself to us in voice-over commentary. "You almost passed me." The house invites us to "see what the mirrors have seen." It turns mournful. "I miss my people. In me they live." The camera coasts through empty rooms as we hear voices welling up from different parts of the past. We don't know the speakers yet, but the device prefigures the dramas to come as well as suggesting Godden's idea that the house continues to harbor fugitive, phantom life. As the camera reveals Rollo talk-

RMM.2. *Enchantment* (1948). The elderly Rollo, sitting at the window seat he shared with Lark when they were children, muses on Lark's exuberant departure for the dance: "Life lies before her. She rushes to it eagerly."

RMM.3. The camera pans right to pick up Lark, many years earlier, tripping down the staircase.

RMM.4. At the end of this flashback, Lark climbs the stairs in a very different mood. She believes Rollo has abandoned her.

RMM.5. In a symmetrical movement, the camera pans leftward back to the embittered Rollo, now wrapped in the darkness of the past.

ing with his solicitor, the voice-over explains, "The house is his story."

Trimming back Godden's ensemble plot, the narration gives us a protagonist and identifies what happens to the house with what has happened to him. Yet the house takes precedence, in that the flashbacks aren't triggered by his or anyone else's memory. This is rare in classical cinema of the period, which usually motivated returns to the past by someone's recounting or recalling earlier events. It would be too glib to say that these flashbacks are "the house remembering," but the transitions are more objectively anchored than usual. This option allows us to sense the shape of time more acutely than the characters can.

Subjectivity does enter, at least apparently, in Rollo's internal dialogues with Lark. At various points she speaks to him in imagination, or in some realm the lovers share. Again, though, we can't wholly ascribe those voices to his mind. After Rollo has been killed, the camera tracks back from his body. As in the beginning, voices haunt the parlor. During the camera movement the young Lark asks, "We shall always be in love, won't we?" "Yes," Rollo replies. "Even when we're old?" "Even when we're old."

The film doesn't confine its action as strictly to the house as Godden's novel does. We visit dances and parties, and we follow Grizel to her job at the military post and the young Rollo to a shop to buy Lark a necklace. Nevertheless, the sense of enclosure, not to mention closure, is provided after we've seen Rollo felled by the German bombardment. The camera continues backward, through a window as the house's voice-over narration assures us that no story really ends.

The house seems to have cheered up in the course of the narrative. Having survived the Blitz, no longer missing its departed dwellers, it looks forward to a new generation. We know that Grizel will inherit the home, and if Pax survives the war he will join her there. Echoing the future-oriented ending of *Take Three Tenses*, the house concludes, "In me, the young will live again, with the heart's lease on life."

You can argue that *Enchantment* softens the novel's harsher side. There Rollo loses Lark by prevaricating, while in the film their separation stems from Selina's subterfuges. Even so, the film preserves the bitter self-reproach of the lonely Rollo, along with the severe self-denial we find in Grizel, who sees her fear of passion as "the Dane vice." Then there's the house as a wise reliquary of human lives, murmuring with voices from the past. *Enchantment* trims off many of Godden's experimental efforts, but it preserves some of them and adapts others in unexpected ways. A delicate novel of middlebrow modernism has encouraged some 1940s schemas to be refreshed.

CHAPTER 7

Into the Depths

A mass of living, pulsating flesh—the mind. It destroys, distorts, creates monsters . . .

Prologue to *Inner Sanctum* films

RESTRICTION VERSUS OMNISCIENCE VERSUS THE MOVING spotlight, attachment versus detachment, floating or bouncing or fading voice-overs, narrators dead or alive or in-between: these pervasive techniques of storytelling went largely unnoticed by critics of the period. In his comments on *The Seventh Cross*, (1944) Parker Tyler, supreme connoisseur of oddities and "crevices" in Hollywood movies, did not even mention that the story was recounted by an exceptionally well-informed corpse.[1]

Yet as we've seen, some contemporaries did notice certain new trends, like flashbacks and voice-overs. One other trend leaped out: an exceptional psychological depth in cinematic narration. Films were now plumbing the inner lives of their characters to an unprecedented degree.

Most obviously, the camera lens might represent a character's physical viewpoint. The subjective camera, Herb A. Lightman claimed in 1946, could enhance audience involvement.[2] "First-person storytelling," noted another writer, "is one of the most serious concerns that can confront an experimental film maker,

7.1. *Cover Girl* (1944).

and it must be approached with daring, imagination, and depth of understanding."[3]

Filmmakers became more alert to deeper levels of mental life. Lightman noted that montage sequences were starting to convey "the distortions of a dream or the disconnected impressions of a deranged mind."[4] One scene Darryl F. Zanuck proposed for *Laura* (1944) was to show McPherson visiting a newsreel theater. While he watched, every woman appearing in a newsreel shot would dissolve into an image of Laura. "Finally the scene is filled with Lauras."[5]

Admittedly, purely external or objective narration can be absorbing. *Cover Girl* (1944), for instance, clearly signals Rusty's mental states through her behavior. Yet we also benefit from deeper access to the mind of *Vanity* publisher Coudair, thanks to flashbacks presenting his romantic pursuit of Rusty's grandmother. These memories, shown in recounted flashbacks, offer more vivid explanations of his motives for pursuing Rusty than pure dialogue would. *Cover Girl* grants subjective narration to Danny as well. After Rusty stands him up for their date, he imagines a ghostly twin who upbraids him for holding back her career. Then the two Dannys dance (fig. 7.1).

Silent-era filmmakers in America and elsewhere developed a rich repertory of subjective effects. A single-shot flashback might indicate the quick burst of memory. Filmmakers freely inserted fantasy images to reveal characters' hopes or fears. Subjective presentation was fairly sophisticated quite early. In the 1915 feature *The Gangsters and the Girl* the heroine imagines two possible

7.2. The dream sequence of *Spellbound* (1945) maintained Selznick's reputation for spectacle and Hitchcock's reputation for technical flamboyance.

outcomes of the action, both of which we see, and the plot actually concludes with a third alternative.

During the 1930s, partly because filmmakers considered such cadenzas heavy-handed, bursts of subjectivity became rare. Optical point-of-view shots might be used occasionally, but for the most part external narration, presented through dialogue and performance, gave all the access to characters' inner lives we were likely to get. During the 1940s, however, films started to regain some of the psychological penetration of silent-cinema narration, and that probing has remained a resource of Hollywood filmmaking.

The general goal was greater intimacy with the characters, an effort to understand them from the inside. In many of the most ambitious forties productions, the behavioral, observational approach to narrative that dominated the 1930s gave way to efforts to expose why characters acted as they did—the "why" being now less social and external (impoverished environment, bad companions) than psychological (trauma, neurosis). But proximity to the characters' minds, if treated in a very stylized fashion, may offer less an explanation than a dazzling spectacle, an occasion for technical virtuosity in the use of special effects and shot design. A shot like figure 7.2 seems aimed less at probing psychology than at showing off.

Still, the era's innovations went pretty far. In playing up and playing with mental activity, cinematic narration gained an economy and density seldom seen before. The neutral, functional staging and framing of the 1930s gave way to sharper, more ex-

pressive compositions, and those in turn could serve as a framework for markedly subjective passages: point-of-view (POV) tracking shots, dream sequences, hallucinations. Plots cunningly manipulated viewpoint and suppressed information. Musical scores became drenched in characters' feelings, while sound effects evoked fear or memories. Composers exploited new instruments like the theremin and the Sonovox as ways to evoke the eerie mysteries of the mind. Characters began talking to themselves and to the audience.

Discreet or flashy, daring or routine, these techniques had broader effects as well. They probably encouraged Maya Deren, Kenneth Anger, Curtis Harrington, and other 1940s-50s American avant-gardists to push in more radical directions. And the forties legacy persists today, when private imagery, mysterious narrators, and inner voices drift through our films. David Lynch, Christopher Nolan, Steven Soderbergh, and Wes Anderson are reworking conventions now seventy years old.

THE SUBJECTIVE TURN

Like flashbacks and voice-over narration, and often in coordination with them, Hollywood's plunge into subjectivity owed a good deal to other media. Modernist literature is an obvious, if distant, source. But techniques of "inner monologue" and "stream of consciousness" promoted by Joyce and Woolf had already passed into middlebrow modernism. Popular novels like Dalton Trumbo's 1939 *Johnny Got His Gun*, confined to the mental world of a blind, deaf, and mute quadriplegic veteran, may have opened up filmmakers to the power of a radically subjective narration.

Even pulp material probably furnished models.

> I closed my eyes. Big funnels of whizzing, whorling blackness, shot with bright yellow lights, revolved toward me.
>
> I saw Anna, with her white face and red mouth.
>
> Quick, bright pictures of Anna flashed through the spinning blackness. Anna, in her floppy brown hat. Anna, in her kimono with the red parrots. Leaning over, pulling sheer black stockings

> up her long, tanned legs. Anna, standing in the white robe with the blue belt, clutching a handful of the toweling while I kept my hand on the knob of the bedroom door.

This might easily be a montage sequence from a forties noir. It appears in a 1934 novel by Don Tracy, *Criss Cross* (which was made into a noir film in 1949). In turn, the passage seems influenced by 1930s Hollywood montage sequences. By the mid-1940s novels featured cascades of half-formed impressions in mimicry of film. We even find the movie term "sequence."

> For a decidedly unpleasant moment she saw flashing sequences of a prison cell and a high wall, an automobile taking a turn on two wheels, a motorcycle going into a tree and three more motorcycles coming on down the road. She heard the guns and she saw the prison cell again, but a fantastic metamorphosis was taking place—the stone walls had panels, there were velvet curtains, the stone was marble.[6]

Other domains of popular culture displayed the subjective turn. Stage plays tried to dramatize mental activity, as in Tennessee Williams's *The Purification* (1940), in which a young man's memory conjures up his vanished sister. Irwin Shaw's *Sons and Soldiers* (1943) dramatizes a pregnant woman's vision of her child's future life. Late 1930s radio writers began to make use of comparable techniques. A drama program often presented a character's flow of thoughts in alternation with spoken dialogue, in the manner we saw at work in *Lydia* (1941). Arch Oboler, who in 1940 aired an adaptation *of Johnny Got His Gun* as a dramatic monologue, claimed to have brought literary stream of consciousness to radio.[7]

A novel or radio play might consist of one long inner monologue, but in cinema subjective devices tend to show up piecemeal, exploited for immediate effect. Just as momentarily restricted narration usually operates in an omniscient frame of reference, bursts of subjectivity arise within a broadly objective presentation. Often those bursts will seem opportunistic

7.3. *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940).

and one-off, but sometimes they harmonize in ways that yield a unique experience for the viewer.

As with flashback and voice-over options, the menu of subjective techniques was established fairly early in the decade. The expressionistic *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940), directed by the Russian émigré Boris Ingster, flung together optical point-of-view shots, inner monologues, memory flashbacks (both pictorial and auditory), and hallucinatory images representing the protagonist's anticipation of arrest and execution (fig. 7.3). Flamboyant subjective techniques can be inexpensive, so as a B picture, *Stranger* could flaunt them. Throughout the 1940s Bs, particularly horror entries, enlivened their plots with these elements. *Calling Dr. Death* (1943) incorporates a demented montage sequence, a distorted hallucination under hypnosis, and a flashy POV tracking shot. Similar effects spark up the notoriously low-end *Detour* (1945).

The flurry of flashback pictures of 1940–42 crystallized comparable possibilities for A-movie storytelling. One of the boldest offerings was *H. M. Pulham, Esq.*, released in December 1941 (a week before *How Green Was My Valley*). "Could a picture be told completely in the first person?" asked director King Vidor in a publicity article. "We decided to try it."

For Vidor that first of all meant restriction to the protagonist's range of knowledge. So Harry Pulham is "in every scene of the picture or is in the room when every scene happens."[8] Even his telephone calls show only him, never the person at the other end of the line. In addition, the film is built on several flashbacks,

some lasting only a minute or so. "In 1941," Vidor recalled, "it was a most provocative form of motion-picture continuity and supplied the director with interesting camera ideas that might not have happened had the story been told in straight chronology."[9] In late 1941, a string of brief flashback episodes seemed fresh enough to boast about.

Because the original novel consists of Harry's reminiscences, *H. M. Pulham, Esq.*, incorporates inner monologues as voice-over commentary. Vidor called this "the 'thinking voice' treatment by which we can show Pulham's innermost thoughts."[10] A more unusual option was Vidor's decision to render the phone conversations without the usual "futzing," those filters that reassure us that the voice comes from the receiver. In *H. M. Pulham*, the caller's voice sounds exactly like other voices in the scene. "Why should the audience strain to listen? . . . I thought we should just direct it to sound the way it sounded to the person."[11] This crispness still seems odd, so used are we to the futzing convention.

The film's most striking manipulation of subjectivity and sound wasn't, it seems, mentioned by Vidor at the time or later. Late in the flashback series we see Harry marrying his girlfriend Kay. A voice-over in the past tense ("Well, there I was . . .") leads to the couple's meeting at the altar. But all dialogue has drained out of the scene. The preacher is speaking, but what we hear, apart from subdued bird tweets, is Harry's recollection: "Exactly what he was saying, I don't seem to remember because his Adam's apple was distracting my attention." Only when Harry agrees to cherish Kay do we hear dialogue from the scene, Harry's vow "I will." Then we hear the preacher, Harry, and Kay repeat the vows, not in alternation but all at once, in awkward confusion. Soon Harry's and Kay's lines become sheer gibberish. The garbled ceremony is a projection of Harry's confusion about his marriage.[12]

H. M. Pulham shows that subjectivity was very much on the menu at the start of the decade. Soon a fairly ordinary release could draw on a wide range of techniques. *The Fallen Sparrow* (1943) starts with Kit McKittrick staring at his reflection in the window of his train compartment, and we hear his voice-over asking if he has the courage to do what he must. Later we get a striking use of obscured optical POV (figs. 7.4 and 7.5). The most

7.4. *The Fallen Sparrow* (1943): Kit strains to see a man . . .

7.5. . . . getting out of a taxi above him. The difficulty of seeing the man makes us concentrate, with Kit, on his telltale footstep as he limps into the brownstone.

richly developed subjective device in *The Fallen Sparrow* is the harsh sound of a limping man's footsteps. We learn its significance when Kit explains to his friend that during his years in a Spanish prison he could measure time only in sounds—the dripping of water, and particularly the dragging footsteps in the corridor, inevitably a signal of a fresh torture session. As Kit first explains the sounds, we hear them in musical form, with the score mimicking them. After he escaped the prison, he recovered. "No more noises?" asks the friend. Kit says no.

But Kit is wrong. Soon, alone in the friend's apartment, he hears the scraping steps in his mind, and music suggesting dripping water gives way to real dripping from the kitchen faucet. In a frenzy Kit opens the windows to let in the noises of the Manhattan night, and he lunges to the piano to pound out chords that will drown the footsteps. The faucet's noise apparently triggered Kit's memory of the dripping, which called up the footsteps, although, through a sort of backward association, these impressions are presented to us in reverse order.

Later, in the apartment of his friend's cousin, Kit hears the footsteps. He looks outside; there's no one there. He realizes he's been imagining the sound. And after the woman joins him, he halts and listens, telling her he hears the steps again; but we, like her, hear nothing. This moment of acoustic objectivity confirms that the noises are purely in Kit's imagination. Yet at the

film's climax his anxieties are justified. Kit waits tensely inside a study while the familiar dragging steps approach the door, and this time the noise is for real. The limping man has pursued him to New York.

MY EARS AND EYES

As *H. M. Pulham, Esq.*, and *The Fallen Sparrow* suggest, a film using subjective techniques seldom confines itself to a single level of mental activity. We get a character's immediate perception as well as deeper mental states. Still, it's worth separating out the options so we can chart the range of each one.

Start with perceptual subjectivity, the sights and sounds picked up by the character. Throughout the 1940s, auditory subjectivity is more common than optical POV. Monaural sound can't replicate a point in space as precisely as a camera can, but sound personnel of the period did provide cues for an approximate "sound perspective." Through volume, pitch, and texture, in almost every scene filmmakers used sound to emphasize what characters were concentrating on.

As usual, conventions kick in. Dialogue often remains strangely constant in volume from shot to shot, regardless of changes in camera distance. But volume can vary when the characters are arrayed in depth or located in resonant rooms. And noises are often given plausible spatial treatment. A police siren getting louder means the cops are coming. A character shuts the door of a phone booth: the sounds outside become muffled. A tracking shot follows a character, and the passing street noises rise and subside. In *The Fallen Sparrow*, the scraping footsteps Kit imagines are held at a constant level, but at the climax, when they're actually in the scene, they gain quasi-realistic perspective as they approach.

In extreme cases, the soundtrack can call attention to a character's auditory experience. When the protagonist of *Pickup* (1951) starts to go deaf, we hear whining pulsations that blot out sound from the scene. Later, in shots that isolate him among others, the sound drops out entirely. At a party, the tormented protagonist of *A Double Life* (1948) claps his hands over his ears several times, and the guests' chatter subsides.

7.6. *The Window* (1949): The boy on the fire escape . . .

7.7. . . . stares at the slumped body of the murdered man.

Normally, though, what theorists of film sound call a "point of audition" is less exactly specified than a spatial point of view.[13] The most precise form of perceptual subjectivity is the optical POV shot, the camera as the character's eyes.

A one-off technique since the silent era, the POV shot was more thoroughly developed in the 1940s. It came to be identified with Hitchcock's work, but one-off POV shots aren't unusual in any film. We might see a pursuer from the standpoint of the pursued, as when the protagonist of *Street of Chance* (1942) glimpses a thug reflected in a window. *The Lodger* (1944) drew notice for a bumpy camera movement that presents the killer's viewpoint as he closes in on his victim.[14] A film centering on a witness to murder could show the crime from the onlooker's position (figs. 7.6 and 7.7).

"'Let's make the camera a character,'" wrote Raymond Chandler; "it's been said at every lunch table in Hollywood at one time or another."[15] He may have been thinking about the personified camera Welles conceived for his 1939 version of *Heart of Darkness*, but he was referring specifically to Robert Montgomery's adaptation of a Chandler novel. *The Lady in the Lake* (1947) presents nearly all of its narrative through purely subjective shots, showing us what detective Philip Marlowe sees and hears as he investigates.

As a result, characters talk to the camera, we hear Marlowe respond, his hands occasionally rising into view, and we glimpse Marlowe's face only when he passes a mirror (fig. 7.8). The cam-

7.8. *The Lady in the Lake* (1947): Thanks to a mirror, we see Philip Marlowe in the scene, though the suspect's gaze at the camera reminds us that we're supposedly looking through his eyes.

7.9. When we're not getting Marlowe's optical POV, he's a narrator confiding in us and framing flashback episodes.

era gets socked and kissed. Montgomery decided that cuts would spoil the idea of a continuous optical viewpoint, so scene transitions are handled by switching to shots in which Marlowe, seated in his office, tells us, in to-camera monologue, what he did during gaps in the action (fig. 7.9). In sum, four striking conventions of the era's cinema—flashbacks, first-person POV, voice-over commentary, and to-camera address—constitute the narrational basis of the film.

The Lady in the Lake is the sort of extreme experiment that Hollywood wouldn't have dared before the 1940s.[16] A more judicious use of the sustained optical POV comes in Delmer Daves's *Dark Passage* (1947). Released nearly a year after Montgomery's film, it shows how the first-person camera could be absorbed into a wider, more objective narrative context. *Dark Passage* starts with shots of a barrel jouncing on the back of a truck. When it tips off onto the roadside and starts rolling, we are now inside the barrel with Vincent Parry, who has escaped from prison. He crawls out, and for a considerable time we see only what he sees (fig. 7.10). Daves changes angles with "invisible" cuts and covers time gaps with dissolves. Parry manages to evade the police by hitching a ride to San Francisco with the sultry Irene Jansen.

Once Parry crawls out of the barrel, we mostly see what he sees. But alongside the subjective shots are many objective ones (fig. 7.11). The purpose of this "dark passage," it turns out, is not to restrict us to what the hero sees and hears, as in *Lady in the Lake*.

7.10. *Dark Passage* (1947): Through the eyes of a fugitive: stripping an unconscious man.

7.11. A conventional shot of Irene driving fulfills the same function as the POV images: concealing Parry, who's crouching in the back seat.

Instead, the POV keeps us from seeing something important: Parry's face.[17] Why? In San Francisco he visits a plastic surgeon, who gives him a new face—that of Humphrey Bogart. Daves could have presented this change of appearance by altering Bogart's face with prostheses or by having another actor play Parry at the start, with Bogart's voice dubbed in. But these alternatives posed problems of their own. Daves settled on the extended first-person camera as a way to suppress the fugitive's appearance. Once Parry comes out of surgery, the film plays out objectively.

The POV shot that conceals who's seeing what we see can be used to arouse curiosity on a small scale. *The Dark Past* (1948) opens with a documentary-style handheld shot representing the viewpoint of a commuter boarding a bus. His voice-over commentary discusses his efforts to study the people around him and understand their inner lives. Eventually the presentation becomes objective when the POV figure is revealed to be a police psychiatrist. Keeping us uncertain about whose eyes we're looking through would be an important function of the optical POV shot decades later, especially in slasher films of the 1980s onward.

Even when we know who's looking, the POV shot proved a useful way to restrict narration. In *Panama Lady* (1939), the heroine is kidnapped, and we see her viewpoint as her eyes are blindfolded. We hear dialogue offscreen but can barely see the scene in front of her. Similarly, a woozy POV flashback in *Where Danger Lives* (1950) conceals what an offscreen character is up to.

7.12. *The Spiral Staircase* (1946): After a huge close-up, the camera travels, à la *Vertigo*, into the watcher's eye.

7.13. The bulging image suggests not only the picture on the retina but a cloudy mind as well. As the film goes on, the eye will be invaded by fantasy imagery.

Throughout film history, the optically subjective shot is a handy way *not* to see something that might be important.

As in this last instance, optical subjectivity also includes cases of impaired vision—blurring or distorting the image to suggest that a character is drunk or drugged or about to faint. Again, a common technique in the 1920s cinema was revived in the 1940s. Acid thrown into a painter's eyes (*Dead Man's Eyes*, 1944) yields smeared POV shots. The spying eye we're permitted to glimpse at the start of *The Spiral Staircase* (1946) is shown objectively, but then it reveals a warped vision (figs. 7.12 and 7.13).

GOING MENTAL

Perceptual subjectivity is only a start. The footsteps that stalk Kit from Spain to Manhattan remind us that optical and auditory POV techniques are often accompanied by a deeper plunge into characters' minds. The insistence on representing mental events—memories, imaginings, hallucinations, dreams—is a hallmark of the era, and as we'd expect we find a range of options. This shift to subjectivity is another way 1940s Hollywood revives techniques of silent cinema while revitalizing them through sound and newly minted pictorial devices.

Perhaps the most prosaic level of mental life is that captured by what literary historians call "inner monologue." These passages state the character's thoughts in well-formulated language.[18]

Developed in the nineteenth-century novel, it was a standard technique in popular fiction. By the 1930s, the shift to inner speech was often signaled by italics.[19]

> Lynn thought, *I'm not shocked. I ought to be shocked, but I'm not. I'm AFRAID, that's all. For Jennie*.[20]
>
> The room rocked again. *I'm going to faint*, thought Maida. *I've got to get that dog away from him. I've got to*—[21]

When the character needed some self-laceration, inner monologue could switch from the first-person to second-person address.

> He suddenly put out his hand to the ash tray and stubbed out his quarter-smoked cigarette. *Never mind what you swore you'd do*, he told himself. *You were not imagining Linda then*.[22]

On the stage, the comparable technique is the soliloquy. It had been largely abandoned in the modern Western theater until it was revived on a grand scale by O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* (1928). Early productions of the play signaled the "mental asides" by a shift in the musing character's voice, changes in lighting, and a suspension of other stage action.[23] Radio plays thrived on an equivalent of the soliloquy. Welles's "first-person singular" approach and Oboler's "stream of consciousness" dramas depended on characters' incessantly voicing their thoughts.[24]

Hollywood was cautious about adopting the convention. When *Strange Interlude* was brought to film in 1932, the inner monologues caused problems. Scenes tend to freeze while voices drone on over close-ups, and at certain points several characters' voice-overs alternate with almost comic coordination. A few other 1930s films, such as *The Life of Vergie Winters* (1934) and the flamboyant *Crime without Passion* (1934), display greater fluidity in using the technique.[25]

Once filmmakers had mastered tight synchronization, multiple-track rerecording, and better microphone control, the inner monologue could come into its own. Once again, *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940) affords an early prototype. Long stretches

of the film play out with voice-over thoughts. Our protagonist, a reporter who has testified against the man found guilty, is beset by doubts. As he pauses outside the courtroom, he thinks,

> *What's the matter with me? I'm getting soft. He did it. Of course he did it.*

Angels over Broadway (1940) commences with the gambler's private lament:

> *There must be a seven holdin' out for me somewhere.*

Soon enough, the inner monologue began to flourish in many varieties. As with fiction, the first-person pronouns can be replaced by second-person direct address. In *The Fallen Sparrow*, Kit thinks he hears the dragging footsteps.

> *You don't hear him. It isn't there. It's in your head. Like the doc said. All right, suppose it is there. What are you afraid of? You're in New York now. This isn't Spain.*

The Two Mrs. Carrolls (1947) interweaves second-person interiority with cries of anguish to convey Sally's refusal to confront the evidence that damns her husband.

> *It's all very clear now. It's all very clear now, isn't it? The lie, the headache, the killing, the milk. He poisoned her, now he's poisoning you!*
>
> "No! No!"
>
> *Don't be a fool! You know it's the truth. He wants Cecily, not you! He wants to get rid of you, just as he did the first Mrs. Carroll.*
>
> "No! It isn't true! It isn't true!"

When a character is making a decision, the outer voice may soliloquize as "I" while the inner one addresses "you." This split occurs during the quarrel that Bob Hope's cowardly dentist conducts with himself in *The Paleface* (1948).[26]

We tend to assume that inner monologues are reserved for only one character, but they can be spread around. One scene in *A Yank in Burma* (1942) intercuts the thoughts of a man and of the woman he's trying to seduce. In *No Minor Vices* (1948), two sides of a romantic triangle get inner monologues, sometimes underscored by a glance at the camera. In accord with the "choral" principle common on radio, peripheral characters may pipe up. *Our Town* (1940) showed how inner monologues could be passed easily among guests at the wedding. *Naked City* (1948) has a prologue guided by a detached external narrator, but it's supplemented by thoughts from characters we'll not see again: a woman mopping a bank floor, a man tapping at a Linotype machine, a weary nighttime disc jockey.

When patterned across the film, inner monologues can raise a character to greater prominence and multiply emotional effects. *Raw Deal* (1948) crosscuts two story strands: Joe and Pat, a couple on the run, and the gangsters and police pursuing them. There's also a love triangle, because when the couple flee they kidnap Joe's lawyer, Ann. Joe and Ann fall in love. In a normal film, Pat would be a subsidiary character, the woman tossed aside. But both the moving-spotlight tactic and the voice-over lift her to a level equal with Joe and Ann.

In the course of the flight, when Joe is apart from Pat and we're restricted to him, we witness his growing attraction to Ann. But when Pat is alone or with Joe, we get her inner monologue. Her passages of thought raise her in importance, build up sympathy, and prepare for her critical role at the film's climax. Just when Joe has settled on a future with Pat, she learns that Ann is in danger. Should she tell Joe? Our access to her feelings throughout the film has prepared for the moment when she'll free Joe to save the woman he loves more.

Pat's narration in *Raw Deal* illustrates the same promiscuity we observed with respect to flashbacks and frame stories. Her opening monologue starts off in the first-person, present tense.

> *This is the day. This is the day, the last time I shall drive up to these gates—these iron bars that keep the man I love locked away from me.*

The narrational opportunism comes in when at certain moments we get, inconsistently, not Pat's immediate impressions but something recalled from a greater distance. In the middle of the film, when Joe, Pat, and Ann take shelter in the forest, Pat shifts to the past tense:

> *We pulled over to a side road to relax a bit before heading to Oscar's tavern, our hideout in the hills. There was the smell of the pines, and the sky. I suddenly felt—I don't know—big and small at the same time.*

After Ann protects Joe by deflecting a curious trooper, Pat notes:

> *We drove all night through the quiet hills. Joe hadn't said a word. I knew, or thought I knew, what was going on inside of him. She was getting under his skin.*

(Pat's "or thought I knew" leaves open the possibility that she has misinterpreted things. Thanks to the moving spotlight, we know she hasn't.) Pat's impressionistic inner monologues will return after this.

Raw Deal's voice-overs are inconsistent—the monologue is in the moment, the past-tense ponderings could only be after the fact—but the overall flow of the film makes each type salient at the proper instant. Pat's final inner monologue, as she watches Ann clutching the dead Joe in the street, reverts to the present tense and confirms her sacrifice. Joe moves the plot, but Pat regulates the emotional flow.

Learning Pat's thoughts inspires sympathy for her. Optical POV won't automatically arouse feeling for a character, but by accessing a character's mind directly, we can arrive at the real person, whom we may judge for good or ill. If the judgment is favorable, we're primed to feel relative sympathy. In *The Fallen Sparrow*, Kit's memories of torture in Spain create a strong concern for him. We'd not be so sympathetic if we didn't hear his inner monologue. Likewise, the opening montage of a day of taxi rides in *Jealousy* (1945) would simply be a summary of the driver's

routines without her voice-over expressing her feelings of tedium and emptiness.

I say that our sympathy may be relative because, as film theorist Murray Smith has pointed out, a narrative sets up its own hierarchy of moral values.[27] *Raw Deal* presents Ann as an upright lawyer who wants Joe to surrender, while Pat is a gun moll who's broken her man out of prison. But Pat is loyal and self-sacrificing, and we have more direct access to her passionate feelings, so our sympathy with her outweighs our affinity for the more respectable, objectively presented Ann.

Once more, cinema transforms its borrowings from adjacent media. Radio may have given us inner monologues, but there is no visible body to attach to them. The stage soliloquy gives us the body, but it doesn't deal in images. Theatrical production can't force our eyes to a subjective POV, as when a cut in *The Fallen Sparrow* shows us the door that Kit is watching in fear. As for literature, a novel's inward-turned passages typically alternate with objective descriptions of actions, as in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

> Making for the museum gate with long windy strides he lifted his eyes. Handsome building, Sir Thomas Deane designed. Not following me?
>
> Didn't see me perhaps. Light in his eyes.
>
> The flutter of his breath came forth in short sighs.[28]

Prose alternates inner and outer, but cinema can give us the inner and the outer all at once, so that the private voice-over accompanies images of an external, stable story world. As we saw in *The Miniver Story* (1950), forties filmmakers exploited the power of cinema to saturate vision and hearing, a synchronizing of senses with no equivalent in rival art forms.

MEMORY AND IMAGINATION

The same density is revealed in a mental activity "deeper" than inner monologue: memory. During the 1940s the most common direct presentation of memory is the auditory flashback, the snatch of sound from a past scene played over a view of the char-

acter in the present. *Sergeant York* (1941) includes a montage of snippets of earlier dialogue. At the end of *The Miracle of the Bells* (1948) the press agent Dunnigan looks up at the stars and "hears" Olga's earlier pledge: "I am so happy I did my job."

Again, cinema gives us the memory and the current instant simultaneously, while literature must suggest such a blend through rapid alternation.

> His feet, as they carried him to Receiving, were beating out the now terrible words of Celia's letter: *I'm frightened. . . . The whole thing might blow up at any minute and take us with it. Unless someone does something . . . and you're the only person who might.*
>
> *You're the only person who might*. The dark corridor accused him.[29]

Cinema not only layers past and present but can let the present color the past, as in *The Velvet Touch* (1948). The murderous heroine steps on stage and is haunted by lines we've heard before ("How are you going to buy off your conscience?"). But they're now rendered in the ambience of the theater space, as if they were coming from the wings. There can even be a sort of "anticipatory recollection." In *Waterloo Bridge* (1940) the hero in the opening sequence recalls lines from his past. A flashback is about to be launched, so that the dialogue fragments we hear now will become dramatized later in the film.

The auditory flashback on film might be a brief line or something more densely woven than a single line. *Desert Fury* (1947) climaxes in a car chase that crosscuts between two drivers, each recalling warnings received from a petty gangster. *All This and Heaven Too* (1941) includes an inner monologue as the governess revisits the household, and threaded in with her comments are repetitions of things said to her in certain rooms earlier in the story. In *A Double Life*, an actor playing Othello fears that his former wife has a lover. He's plagued by an inner voice warning him and by sonic flashbacks to the play's performance, the whole creating a panicky montage.

As I've suggested, Hollywood flashback sequences are almost always triggered by a character who recalls incidents, but

the sequence won't be restricted to what the character could have witnessed or even known about. The act of remembering merely motivates arranging events out of story order for greater impact. But auditory flashbacks, being mental events, usually do represent character memory. So may brief visual flashbacks, images or quick scenes wedged into the present. At the climax of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Stefan finally recalls who Lisa was, and a swift montage of images from her letter's lengthy flashback gets attributed to *his* memory. As Stephen Byrne, the murderer in *House by the River* (1950), bends over his wife at her dressing table, the glint of her hand mirror reminds him of the sun striking the river at the moment a fish leaped—just as he was dumping the maid's body into the water (fig. 7.14).

Visual flashbacks like these can press further, toward the same expressive exaggeration we find in auditory memories. Forties filmmakers strove for new techniques to convey muddled states of mind; they seemed to try to one-up each other in the search for unusual imagery (fig. 7.15). Occasionally a film may suggest two layers of distortion: one springing from the original trauma and one arising from the painful present (fig. 7.16). In many cases the flashbacks increase empathy for the person gradually piecing together bits of the past.

Beyond memory we can situate imagination, the mental domain representing nonexistent states of affairs in daydreams, visions, and fantasies. Imaginary projection could be found on the Broadway stage of the period: one play provided an entirely fantasized second act, another showed members of a family imagining what would happen when the father returned home.[30] The musical *Oklahoma!* (1943) created a fashion for inserted "fantasy ballets," a device taken up in *Anchors Aweigh* (1945) and later MGM pictures. Radio indulged in private visions as well, though they were hard to sustain because they couldn't be sharply bracketed off from the framing situation.

Again, we find a variorum array of schema revisions. *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (1947), originating in a classic short story by James Thurber, built its entire plot around the protagonist's self-aggrandizing fancies. Audiences encountered a daydreaming little girl in *Kathleen* (1942), a fantasizing ranch lad in *The Red*

7.14. *House by the River* (1950): Thanks to superimposed water, Byrne not only recalls disposing of the maid's body, but he seems to imagine drowning his wife as well.

7.15. In *Clay Pigeon* (1949), the hero's fragmentary memories of torture in a Japanese POW camp shift in and out of blurred negative images—here, showing an officer beating him.

7.16. In *Black Angel* (1946) a character woozily realizes that he committed a murder while drunk. The replay flashback, with swaying, rippling visuals that seem to set the scene underwater, suggests both his intoxication in the past and his new, trembling awareness of his crime.

Pony (1949), and a lovelorn ingenue in *Dream Girl* (1948). Cartoonish sets à la Saul Steinberg depict the imaginings of a rich boy pondering how to prevent his parents' divorce (*The Decision of Christopher Blake*, 1948). The heroine of *State Fair* (1945) imagines "It Might as Well Be Spring" sung by Ronald Colman, Charles Boyer, and Bing Crosby. In a more threatening key, the mute servant in *The Spiral Staircase* (1946) imagines getting married but finds herself unable to say "I do."

For comic or horrific purposes, something presented as real can turn out to be imaginary. A wild murder intrigue in a boardinghouse in *Shadows on the Stairs* (1941) is revealed to be a play by a young writer who has modeled his characters on the tenants. Thanks to stock footage, *Invasion USA* (1952) presents a realistic-looking Soviet takeover of America, only to end by explaining

it as the shared vision of some strangers in a bar, triggered by a fortune-teller's skillful "mass hypnosis."

Involuntary imaginings akin to the scraping footsteps in *The Fallen Sparrow* can haunt a character. Sometimes these passages turn hallucinatory, as when the protagonist of *Specter of the Rose* (1946) is convinced he sees a ballet dancer following him. Dissonant music, or sounds issuing from a theremin or ondes Martenot, could signal the onset of hallucinations. So too could drugged states: semiconscious protagonists summon up a phantom parachute drop (*Dead Reckoning*, 1947) or a room full of cobwebs (*Murder, My Sweet*, 1944).

Most of these passages are clearly either memories or fantasies, but ambitious filmmakers could blur the distinction. Unlike the scene in *The Fallen Sparrow*, when we definitely don't hear what Kit imagines, *Nightmare Alley* (1947) offers at various points replays of the shrieks of the sideshow geek. It's not entirely clear that they are always in the mind of the cynical protagonist; they may be simply the film's way of recalling a key scene and anticipating the protagonist's sordid end.[31] Imagination and memory interpenetrate in *So Dark the Night* (1946) when the schizophrenic Sûreté detective recalls his arrival in the village as he dies. He projects that memory as a filmlike image beyond the window (figs. 7.17 and 7.18).

More elaborately, in the spirit of the ensemble combat film, a long sequence of *The Purple Heart* (1944) shifts among the marines in their POW cell remembering their loved ones. The scene proceeds in different subjective registers. As an Italian American tells of his father's dreams, he hears the old man's favorite song, "Memories." No one else hears the tune, yet as it continues on the sound track it somehow cues other prisoners to muse on their pasts. One captive recites a poem, and in his imagination his wife's voice joins in. Another marine wrings out a rag, which triggers a silent flashback to him and his wife watching their little boy bathe a colt. A third man simply recounts, without benefit of flashback or music, an episode from his childhood. In this compact scene, alternative film techniques create a kind of memory communion among the men; each seems aware of the others' yearnings.

7.17. *So Dark the Night* (1946): The dying policeman, who is the murderer he has pretended to pursue, sees his arrival in the village as a filmlike replay running beyond the tavern window.

7.18. His former self is projected onto his body as he staggers forward. As in many subjective sequences, the filmmakers find new pictorial devices to fulfill common schemas.

Subjective registers blend in pictorial montage sequences as well. Thirties montage sequences tend to be objective, in that they summarize public events through newspaper headlines, newsreel shots, glimpses of the main characters' progress, and the like, all linked by dissolves or wipes. By 1940 these objective montages had become fairly stylized and abstract, and they would continue as a convention in later decades. More characteristic of the 1940s is the *personalized* montage sequence.

Often this sequence will operate in a distinct register: a flurry of flashbacks or a cascade of visions. In one of the decade's most paroxysm-ridden montages (*Blues in the Night*, 1941), a jazz pianist treated for alcoholic memory loss suffers a phantasmagoria of distorted recollections, band instruments hurled into his face, and nightmarish music (fig. 7.19). The *Inner Sanctum* horror films of 1943–44 generously spread flashback and vision montages among the characters. In what seems like a sort of arms race, other filmmakers freely mixed personalized montages with POV shots, memory flashbacks, and pure imagination or delusion.

A personalized montage at the start can give the whole film an expressive coloring. The opening passages of *Moonrise* (1948) evoke the guilt and persecution a murderer's son suffers as he grows up. A 1930s film might have given us a quick array of objective scenes of youthful bullying. Instead the boy is shown slogging through swamp water, writhing in the hands of captors,

7.19. In *Blues in the Night* (1941), show-biz ambition and alcohol-soaked amnesia motivate some of the most flamboyant subjective montages of the period.

and haunted by looming silhouettes of his father on the gallows. Here the traditional function of a montage, compression of time, is shot through with subjectivity, making the protagonist's childhood a nightmare and preparing us for his frenzied act of violence to come.[32]

The guiding principle of the personalized montage is often association, and perhaps these passages represent Hollywood's closest equivalent to fiction's stream of consciousness technique. Yet literature has only words to convey visual and auditory impressions. William James's conception of "stream of thought," from which the literary idea derives, was meant to include images and sounds as well as words.[33] From this angle, film can represent the flow of mental life more fully than language can.

The main difference is that stream of consciousness literature aimed to present the flux of ordinary mental life. Personalized montages, by contrast, pop up chiefly in moments of acute, not to say lurid, stress. We sometimes suspect that the screenwriter and director are grasping for something to amp up the movie's energy, and the results are often sensationalist. Arguably, in their frantic aggressiveness these montages don't yield the quieter sort of sympathy for the character that we get with other plunges into depth. On the plus side, these passages can become showcases for virtuosity. Despite their excesses, they add up to sound cinema's first extended effort to convey the multisensory swirl of a mind on the move.

CHAPTER 8

Call It Psychology

Next he'll produce photographic evidence of his dreams.

Waldo Lydecker in *Laura*

"WOULDN'T YOU LIKE TO MEET YOU?" ASKS THE PSYCHOanalyst in *That Uncertain Feeling* (1941). The drama of profound self-revelation became prominent in forties Hollywood as never before. Filmmakers pushed subjective storytelling to a new extreme. Going beyond indicating visual and auditory point of view, and beyond capturing transient states of mind in brief flashbacks and personalized montages, they sought to reveal characters' hidden motives and desires.

In that process, Hollywood began to take psychoanalysis seriously. Films sought to trace characters' problems back to childhood traumas, or to suppressed hatred of father or mother or sibling. One critic called these movies the "psychiatricals."[1] "For some time now," a psychiatrist wrote in 1948, "Hollywood has been doing its best to make us conscious of the unconscious."[2]

As a result, characterization became somewhat subtler. Heroes and heroines were made aware of repressed sources of their feelings, and they sometimes sensed the fragility of what seemed to be normal life. But as with perceptual subjectivity, the claim to plumb depths also provided an alibi for striking immediate

effects, outrageous imagery, and experimental sound work. The show-offish, unrealistic side of Hollywood could be indulged by appeal to troubled characters and imaginary situations. Dream sequences were less about representing the unconscious in a plausible way than about tying together narrative motifs and startling us with extravagant imagery. Subjectivity invited displays of technical virtuosity, seen in lengthy POV shots or percussive associative editing. "Call it psychology," wrote a sarcastic critic, "and anything goes!"[3]

ROUNDED WITH A SLEEP

The 1940s were Dream Time. As both Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis became absorbed into elite and general culture, dreams were given salience in all arts, high and low. Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko embedded dream imagery in their paintings. A new musical genre called "dream songs" included pop hits like "Laura," "I'm Getting Tired So I Can Sleep," "I Had the Craziest Dream," "Long Ago and Far Away" (from *Cover Girl*), "Sweet Dreams, Sweetheart," and "Dream (When You're Feeling Blue)."[4] In the play *Dream with Music* (1944), a radio soap-opera writer dreams she's Scheherazade. Another play, *Eastward in Eden* (1947), gives us Emily Dickinson dreaming of a placid marriage. Other dramas portray anxieties, as when a military officer dreams himself back to Venice and China in 1545 to prove he'll be a good husband (*A Lady Says Yes*, 1945).

Dreams were virtually obligatory in novels of all sorts. When a book begins, "Unluckily she dreamed and awakened shivering and inexplicably frightened," you know you are in for a woman-in-peril thriller.[5] Chester Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945) starts with the protagonist having three dreams in quick succession, a new one every time he turns over in bed. Charles Jackson's *Lost Weekend* (1944) reports its protagonist's nightmare in ten pages of harrowing detail, ending with a moment of frozen time: "It took Don minutes, minutes, to dream all that took place in that last second before the end. . . . In that second, that tick, he lived whole lives."[6]

Hollywood likewise reveled in the night life of the mind. Of

course, the earliest American films weren't shy about showing dreams; Edwin S. Porter's *Life of an American Fireman* (1903) starts with the firefighter's dream of his family. As with many silent-film techniques, however, the dream sequence waned in the 1930s.[7] The 1940s brought it back with a vengeance, as part of the new interest in subjective storytelling. Sometimes it was used for one-off comic effects, but dreams took on more serious tints as well. The montage techniques used to present memory and visions became even wilder when presenting the roaring assaults of nightmares.

The dream sequence poses a host of creative choices. How long should it be—a brief interlude, a single scene, or the bulk of the plot? Should it be inserted early, perhaps even as the opening scene, or presented later, maybe even at the climax? Should it be flagged *as* a dream, with a shot of a character asleep, or should its status be revealed as a surprise? And should it be treated realistically or with various degrees of stylization? Forties filmmakers would explore all these options and others.

Two films from 1939 present schemas that would be developed in the decade that followed. One, *The Wizard of Oz*, is familiar to generations, while the second, *Blind Alley*, is a remarkable achievement that remains too little known.

Knocked unconscious during a cyclone, Dorothy Gale doesn't know she's dreaming, though the superimposed spinning has tipped us off. At the end Dorothy believes she actually went to Oz, while Aunt Em is the voice of common sense: "We dream lots of silly things."

Yet silly things aren't wholly illusory. In Oz Dorothy finds uncanny equivalents to the Kansas she has left behind. Miss Gulch, the crabby spinster she called a "wicked old witch," becomes the Wicked Witch of the West. In Oz the Witch seizes Toto just as Miss Gulch did and, as he has done before, Toto escapes. The three family farmhands are reincarnated as the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodsman, and the Cowardly Lion. The mysterious Wizard of Oz is not just a counterpart to Professor Marvel, the mountebank Dorothy met while running away from home. Like her, he's an émigré from the Midwest, and in the denouement he offers to take her home in his balloon ("State Fair Omaha"). More

strangely, Professor Marvel seems to have other twins in the doorkeeper and taxi driver she encounters in the Emerald City.

Oz is oddly familiar. The comments of the farmhands in the early scenes get elaborated in the desires of Dorothy's Oz companions for a brain, a heart, and courage. Professor Marvel's crystal ball, suitably swollen, reappears in the Witch's castle, but turned to malevolent purposes. Even the road Dorothy is running down at the start prefigures the Yellow Brick Road that leads to the Wizard. In sum, Dorothy's trip to Oz is made of what Freud called day residue, a flotsam of incidents and images that get combined associatively in sleep.

Dorothy's dream is driven by her frantic fear that Miss Gulch will seize Toto and the family farm, as well as by the general indifference of the adults around her. In the opening, after the grown-ups brush her worries aside, she sings of escaping to a world over the rainbow, where troubles melt away. That land is associated with sleep: Dorothy heard of it, her song explains, in a lullaby, and she knows that there dreams come true.

But after Dorothy runs away from home, Professor Marvel induces her to return by reminding her how much Aunt Em loves her. That return, interrupted by the tornado, becomes the thrust of the film. Dorothy's guilt about leaving the family gets reinforced by another parallel to Professor Marvel's session with her: in the Witch's crystal ball she sees Aunt Em calling her. Once Dorothy finds and populates her dream world, she must escape it. To get out, she must wake up.

It's only a dream, as Aunt Em says, but it has changed everything. When Dorothy awakes, Aunt Em is kinder. The farmhands now bend over her with the gentle concern displayed by their fantasy twins. Above all, Miss Gulch is no longer a threat. Logic would dictate that she is still bicycling through the countryside, bent on seizing Toto and evicting the family. But logic doesn't matter. Miss Gulch is no longer a threat because her avatar, the Wicked Witch, has been killed.

The Wizard of Oz provides one important dream schema for the 1940s.[8] Brief or extended, the dream yields a plot parallel to the surrounding one. The dream is both an escape from current problems and a restatement of them: Dorothy imagines both the

delight of Oz and the threat of the Witch. Conflicts in the waking world are replayed—condensed, exaggerated—in the dream. And surprisingly often the dreamer awakes to a world magically changed from the one she left.

Consider other cases. *Du Barry Was a Lady* (1943) centers on a dimwitted hatcheck clerk in a nightclub who wins the lottery and is able to propose to the showgirl he adores. Celebrating their engagement, he is knocked out and imagines himself Louis XV romancing his lover, the showgirl reincarnated. After encountering his real-world rival in the dream, the clerk learns that he should surrender the showgirl.

Cabin in the Sky (1943) complicates the schema with two false deaths. The rascal Little Joe Jackson is shot in a barroom brawl. Brought home, he dies but is resurrected on six months' probation. Two figures from the afterlife, Lucifer Jr. and the General, will now trail him to contend for his soul. Like Dorothy's companions of the road, they have real-life counterparts, Joe's gambling pal and his minister. Despite his second chance, Joe goes astray again. He is killed in another brawl, but thanks to the faith of his wife Petunia, he's allowed to accompany her to heaven. In the film's final moments, all the supernatural doings, including Joe's two deaths, are revealed as his dream. Alive again, he hugs Petunia as she sings a reprise of "Taking a Chance on Love," her beneficent alternative to Joe's gambling habit.[9]

In a far darker key than these musicals, the two controversial dream films, *The Woman in the Window* (1944) and *The Strange Affair of Uncle Harry* (1945), rely on similar formal premises. Each film's source material (novel, play) propelled a mild-mannered protagonist into a sordid homicide. And each of the original plots comes to a grim conclusion—suicide in one, madness in the other. But neither option was permissible under the Production Code, so something else had to resolve the plot. The solution was the "and then I woke up" device.

As in *The Wizard*, each dream presents an alternative course of events in a world populated by characters we've already met. And both present wish fulfillment and waking-life conflicts. Professor Wanley in *The Woman in the Window* is lured out of his respectable routine by a yearning for sexual adventure. The eve-

ning turns macabre when Wanley in self-defense kills the lover of the woman who has picked him up. Uncle Harry's growing affection for a young colleague is blocked by his hypochondriacal sister Lettie. In the dream, Harry seeks to kill Lettie but accidentally kills his kindlier sister Hester.

It's remarkable that the hoary dream device, the last resort of desperate beginners, could appear in these first-class productions and retain genuine power. Part of that power is the way it allows Hollywood to show that repressed impulses shape characters' inner lives. At least one critic noticed that *Uncle Harry* quite explicitly presented an incestuous situation.[10] Likewise, Professor Wanley's opening lecture on Freud's theory of the unconscious mentions some day residues that are recycled in his lethal dream.[11] In these films, dreams of imaginary crimes allow upbeat endings while still exploring seamy psychological terrain.

Both protagonists emerge safely from their adventures. Professor Wanley is granted a humorous coda when he scuttles away from a woman who seems about to reenact his dream's beginning. *Uncle Harry* benefits from a blatantly magical vanishing act. When Harry comes out of his reverie, his fiancée returns to him and Hester appears, alive, to give her blessing. Lettie, sent to prison in Harry's fantasy, never reappears in the real-world frame story. Like Miss Gulch, Lettie has been deleted from the waking world by the sheer force of the protagonist's imagination.

In this grim company we find the and-then-I-woke-up twist of *Strange Impersonation* (1946). At the plot's center is a gimmick: a dead woman is misidentified as Nora Goodrich, so Nora assumes the victim's identity. But the investigation closes in around her, and at the climax the disguised Nora is about to be arrested for the murder of . . . herself! In the meantime, Nora's attractive assistant Arline, who's partly responsible for the victim's death, has stolen Nora's fiancé. Yet all this hugger-mugger turns out to be pure dreamwork, induced by an experimental anesthesia Nora has tested on herself. In *Strange Impersonation*'s opening scenes, Arline had seemed a bit untrustworthy, and Nora's dream seems to confirm the hints by making her a conniving rival. But when Nora awakes, Arline is revealed as a loyal friend, and Nora can unite with her man.

Besides *The Wizard of Oz*, there's a second crucial film from 1939. *Blind Alley*, a minor Columbia crime picture, provides a daring and detailed template for the clinical psychoanalytic investigation films of the next decade. In this format, the dream is dissected, often by a professional, for its clues to waking misbehavior.

Murderer Hal Wilson has escaped from prison, and his gang has invaded the home of Dr. Shelby, a professor of psychiatry. The gang is waiting for their pals to take them across a lake to safety. When Wilson cold-bloodedly shoots Shelby's student, Shelby vows to destroy him, "to take his brain apart and show him the pieces." Shelby notices that Wilson's left hand is partially paralyzed, and he suspects a psychic cause. Learning that Wilson is plagued by a recurring nightmare, Shelby induces him to talk about it.

The probing of Wilson's past leads to a free-association exercise that reveals the nightmare's harrowing source: the moment when Wilson as a boy led police to his father. The cops shot him down as the boy grabbed the father's gun. Wilson's career as a killer, Shelby points out, stems from both his guilt and his effort to reenact the death. At the climax in the present, when troopers surround the house, Wilson can't fire on them. As Shelby predicted, knowing why he kills prevents him from killing again. Wilson is shot down, and the hostages are saved.

For a 1939 film, *Blind Alley* displays a relatively nuanced treatment of psychoanalysis. Shelby's opening lecture to his class explains that the line between madness and sanity is both thin and culturally relative. He claims that most psychological problems have their roots in childhood, and his relaxed presentation of the theory sets the terms for the cold calm with which he will conduct Wilson's talking cure. Moreover, in the source play Wilson's girlfriend simply recounts his dream, but the film presents it in a boldly stylized fashion with her voice-over. In negative, high-contrast imagery, Wilson walks in the rain, takes shelter under an umbrella, tries to seal a leak in it, and discovers he's actually in a cage (fig. 8.1).

Just as surprisingly, Wilson's breakthrough depends on Shelby's coaxing him to free-associate on the rain, the umbrella,

8.1. *Blind Alley*, 1939: The killer's recurring dream: caged under a dripping umbrella.

8.2. The stylized saloon in which the killer's father will be shot.

and the bars. In voice-over flashback Wilson recounts the traumatic incident, which we see via the boy's optical POV in the manner that *Lady in the Lake* would adopt. The boy leads the police to a bar that is rendered with quasi-Expressionist abstraction, all bare decor and skewed surfaces (fig. 8.2). The boy takes cover under a table as he watches his father stagger to the table and die; blood drips through a crack onto the boy's hand. In the nightmare the umbrella symbolizes the table, the rain stands for the blood, and the bars of the cage are the legs of the policemen surrounding the table, seen from the boy's viewpoint. By pressing against the blood, the boy creates the adult Wilson's deformed hand.

The climactic therapy session takes nine minutes, quite a span in a sixty-nine-minute B film. The memory scene is a tour de force that looks forward to the dreams and traumatic flashbacks of many movies to come. The nightmare constitutes virtually an avant-garde film within the film that goes somewhat further than the subjective montages of *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940).[12] There is even a hint at Wilson's father problem earlier in the film when he shoots the prison warden. As the camera holds on him, he grimaces as if the killing were taking a psychic toll.

Of *Blind Alley*, *Variety* commented, "Psycho-analysis of a criminal provides a new twist to what would otherwise become another crime picture of general trend."[13] In a few years, psychoanalysis itself would become a general trend. For Freud dreams may have been the royal road to the unconscious, but for Hollywood they were handy narrative devices to be creatively switched.

8.3. *The Feminine Touch* (1941): In a Dalíesque dreamscape, the professor's wife happily imagines her husband and his rival fighting over her.

MY DREAM ISN'T YOURS

Like amnesia, dreams are a perennial narrative resource. In folktales, dreamers fall in love, fight off demons, learn of buried treasure, discover trickery, and foresee the future.[14] The Greek god Morpheus could slip into anyone's sleep to deliver messages from the gods, and Joseph and Daniel built solid résumés as decoders of dreams sent by Jehovah.

For every *Woman in the Window* or *Uncle Harry* or *Strange Impersonation*, movies that flirt with the somber side of the Freudian unconscious, there are other films that recruit dreams for lighthearted purposes. Dreams can be simply padding, as in the Looney Tunes episode of *My Dream Is Yours* (1948). They can express wishes in the manner of daydreams (fig. 8.3). *Tom, Dick, and Harry* (1941) shows the heroine dreaming of three possible futures with each of the men pursuing her.

In a farce, dreams can simply add to the silliness; a brace of dude-ranch comedies give us Jack Carson frightened by animals (*Two Guys from Texas*, 1948) and Lou Costello plagued by American Indians (*Ride 'em, Cowboy*, 1942). The dream can materialize both hope and fear, as in *Her Highness and the Bellboy* (1945), when the disabled heroine dreams she can walk but also finds her beloved has been stolen by her sister. A dream can replay earlier incidents in a comic register (*Up in Arms*, 1945). And in an echo of folktales, a lengthy dream tells a playboy prince which of his guests he should woo and then how to keep her (*I Married an Angel*, 1941).

These sequences aren't chiefly concerned with revealing characters' hidden mental states, which are obvious from the overall plot. They serve other formal purposes. The episodes repeat and vary narrative motifs; they display spectacle in set design and special effects; they seek to intensify the film's emotional appeal—in these examples, the bounciness of comedy.

In dramas, standards of plausibility are a bit different, and dreams can test those. *Fear in the Night* (1947) begins with a dream signaled as such through distorted superimpositions. Vince kills a man, but when he wakes he finds tokens of the crime—a button, a key, some neck wounds. How can a homicide committed in a dream leave physical clues? The puzzle drives Vince nearly to suicide. It turns out that the narration has omitted events leading up to the dream. Vince committed the crime in a hypnotized state, then recalled it in his dream.

Or take the device of the prophetic dream, familiar from Old Testament figures like Micaiah, who foresees how God will destroy Ahab. Popular dream books of the 1930s professed faith that some dreams could foretell the future. In *Destiny* (1944), an ex-convict has been plagued by a childhood dream that predicted his mother would be killed. When he gets a job as a farm laborer, he dreams he shoots the farmer while hunting. In the dream, the ex-con is killed when he falls into a raging river. The dream expresses both his desire to possess the farmer's daughter and his punishment for the thought. Waking up, he worries that he's going to commit another crime and starts to leave. His departure is interrupted by the offscreen cries of the farmer, who has accidentally shot himself. The ex-con's dream has predicted the accident, but eventually he realizes his fate isn't tied to what his dreams foretell. The prison warden's counterprophecy—that he can learn to trust people—will prove to be the correct one.[15]

Escape in the Fog (1945) provides a freer, quasi-biblical prophetic dream. The opening sequence shows Elaine Carr walking over a bridge on a foggy night. She meets a policeman and soon witnesses a man trying to escape from a car and being beaten by the men with him. She screams. But this scene is revealed as merely a dream. Elaine is recuperating from a mental breakdown after the bombing of her hospital ship. Soon she falls in love with

Barry Malcolm, who's assigned a dangerous mission in Hong Kong. Both are shadowed by German agents, and Barry is kidnapped for the papers he's carrying.

Elaine's dream gets repeated twice, once in her mind and once in reality. After Barry has disappeared, she is again walking in the fog. She's knocked down by a car, and in her stunned state she undergoes—this is the forties, after all—a flashback to the dream. Driven by that memory, she finds the bridge where her dream "took place." Again a patrolman asks if she's okay. Again the car pulls up and Barry breaks away to escape. Again there's a scuffle, and again she screams. This time the car drives off leaving Barry behind.

The rest of *Escape in the Fog*, revolving around retrieving the crucial papers, conveniently neglects to explain either the prophetic dream or Elaine's ability to locate its site in the real world. Nor is her being a traumatized vet ever developed. The plot laughs off its key device in the epilogue. Once more we're on the bridge, with Barry and Elaine strolling in the fog. "I hope," she says calmly, "I'm not dreaming tonight." The film becomes Exhibit A in the carefree irrealism of Hollywood dream plots, whose schemas can be revised in illogical but arresting ways.

Strange Illusion (1945) uses the prophetic dream device to replay *Hamlet* in sunny California. Young Paul Cartwright is distraught when he learns his widowed mother is romantically interested in slick operator Brett Curtis. Paul's suspicion of Curtis is justified: Curtis is conspiring with his psychiatrist to fleece Paul's mother. With the help of the family doctor, Paul prevents the marriage and reveals that Curtis and the psychiatrist murdered Paul's father in order to take over his family and his estate.

Paul's wariness is triggered by a recurring dream that opens the film. Paul is walking toward the camera, superimposed over clouds. We see a flashback image of the father's death, his car pushed into the path of a train. This memory is accompanied by uneasy suggestions of actions yet to happen. Paul's mother and sister join him in the clouds, praising his "new father," a shadowy figure who tries to reassure him. We also get images of a lion's-head bracelet and the sound of Schumann's piano music. These, along with Curtis's line "Just what I've been waiting for," will

reappear in the film to come as clues to Curtis's scheme. Paul will later describe another dream image, a farmhouse, and this will lead to some clues about how the murder was arranged.

How Paul can divine things to come is never explained; his "dream detection" flummoxes the district attorney. Fortunately, with the doctor's aid Paul finds solid evidence of the conspiracy and the family is saved. The Oedipal dynamic becomes fairly simple: the dream, along with a posthumous letter from Paul's father, enables the son to expunge the man who has usurped his father's place, all the while preserving the purity of his mother, whom he calls Princess. She in turn can be replaced by Paul's virginal girlfriend Lydia.

In a peculiar epilogue, *Strange Illusion* gives us Paul once more in a daze, and we get a sequence parallel to the opening dream. Now he and his mother and sister are cheerfully striding through the clouds, with the false father's place taken by the good doctor. Paul is now arm in arm with Lydia, as if marching down the aisle. If we expect him to awake and embrace Lydia in the conventional clinch, we're disappointed. He remains asleep as the movie ends.

FREUD IN THE FRONT ROW

Hollywood dreams obey the imperatives of folklore, but only implicitly. Explicitly, they're often absorbed in one version of psychoanalysis.

That version was vulgarized, to be sure. American psychoanalysts and psychiatrists recast Freud's theory in ways that angered the founding father. His emphasis on childhood sexuality, erotic symbolism, the death drive, and other disturbing features of psychic life were played down in favor of "ego psychology." American practitioners emphasized adjustment to social circumstances, and they supplemented psychoanalysis with drugs and other therapies.[16]

Popular culture picked up these themes and adapted them to narrative ends. *Blind Alley*, for instance, doesn't follow up Professor Shelby's hint that everything revolves around Wilson's mother because she preferred the father to the son. The Oedipal scenario is invoked only to be forgotten. No good Freudian would

have missed a chance to interpret the boy's keeping his father's pistol and becoming a professional "gun-man." And *Blind Alley*'s "this means that" symbolic tagging misses the complex Freudian processes of condensation and displacement.

Still more oversimplified was the editorial gloss *Life* magazine provided for MGM's 1941 remake of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The 1932 Paramount version had used a sexually daring flashback montage to show the frustrated Jekyll becoming the rapacious Hyde, but the later version goes further. A hallucinatory sequence heaves up a sweaty fantasy of Jekyll whipping Ivy and his fiancée Beatrix as both women strain to pull his chariot. Something equally dominating is suggested in the second montage, another delirium that shows both women as water nymphs inside a champagne bottle—a fantasy that anticipates scenes in which Jekyll will seduce and kill Ivy. These bursts of images were somewhat curtailed by censorship but remain fairly shocking.[17]

In the story's pre-Freudian milieu no character could diagnose the obvious displacement of Jekyll's sexual desire by Hyde's violence. In fact, we're the only ones with access to Jekyll/Hyde's mind. But *Life*'s picture spread offers viewers help in advance. The editorial comment deplored the film as having "no serious value . . . as one of the first attempts to introduce Freud into a US movie," but the photos provided captions explaining obvious symbolism (flowers to convey Bea's innocence, the chariot representing Hyde's sadism). The title of the display could not be starker: "These Freudian Montage Shots Show Mental State of Jekyll Changing to Hyde."[18] Later for *The Lost Weekend* Paramount's press office would provide a Freudian explanation of the protagonist's hallucination of a bloody fight between a bat and a mouse.[19]

In forms both complex and simple, psychoanalysis was firmly part of 1940s America. Popular magazines were filled with accounts of doctors restoring mental health. Military hospitals used psychoanalysis as well as hypnosis, electroshock treatment, and drugs to heal "battle fatigue" and "war neuroses." In spring 1943 the government allowed journalists to publish stories about these therapies, partly to stress that the men were genuine heroes and not crazy.[20] Many Hollywood figures underwent analysis them-

selves. "On the slightest provocation, people went to see a psychiatrist," recalled director Curtis Bernhardt. "Everybody: writers, directors, stars, producers."[21]

Psychiatrists and psychoanalysts stepped into popular culture as comic characters, helpers, or lunatics. The most famous play of the period featuring a psychoanalyst, T. S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* (1949), was a social comedy. There were several stage farces too, like *Cure for Matrimony* (1939), in which a psychiatrist hypnotizes three friends and watches how they behave with his wife. In *Horse Fever* (1940), a racehorse undergoes the talking cure. By contrast, the 1942 play *The Walking Gentleman* shows a serious psychiatrist explaining a serial killer's motivations.

The same range of types can be found in film. For every crazy shrink (*Fingers at the Window*, 1942) and every lecherous one (*That Uncertain Feeling*, 1941; *Cat People*, 1943) there are idealists like young Parris Mitchell in *Kings Row* (1942) and the kindly child psychologist in *Shadow on the Wall* (1950). The Crime Doctor series (1943–47) had a sensationalist bent, but it did take mental illness somewhat seriously.[22] It was taken unseriously in comedies like *She Wouldn't Say Yes* (1945), with a frosty lady psychiatrist who needs to learn, as usual, to warm up to romance.

When mental problems moved to the center of the plot, psychoanalytic explanations were sometimes invoked. Welles famously called *Citizen Kane*'s hint of mother fixation "dollar-book Freud."[23] Even toned down from its scandalous source novel, *Kings Row* suggested fathers' incestuous impulses toward their daughters. *Bluebeard* (1944), *Hangover Square* (1945), *The Madonna's Secret* (1946), *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* (1947), and other thrillers invited Freudian interpretations of artistic creativity. While the Western *Pursued* (1947) had to rely on do-it-yourself healing of a childhood trauma, other films gave clinical specialists a central role. Worrisome dreams called forth dream doctors. Just as Wilson's recurring dream in *Blind Alley* is explained by Professor Shelby's diluted Freudianism, the murderous nightmare that opens *Manhandled* (1949) is interpreted by a psychoanalyst who informs the patient that every dream is a wish fulfillment.

Does Hollywood's flirtation with psychoanalysis "reflect" the popularization of Freud's theories? It's more exact to say that the

films were seizing bits of theory for traditional storytelling ends. From the start, critics pointed out that filmmakers fitted psychoanalytic method to well-worn formulas. Keith Sward, a clinical psychologist, pointed out in 1948 that movies' new conventions cut many corners.

The screen neurotic, Sward notes, tends to be at best a criminal, at worst a killer. The symptoms aren't the most common ones, like depression or withdrawal, but rather amnesia, sleepwalking, kleptomania, and other rare behaviors. The source of the patient's problem is a single traumatic event, usually in childhood, whereas real-life neurotics have been subjected to a prolonged traumatic atmosphere. The cause of mental illness is personal, stemming from family or friends, not work or broader social factors. As for the method of treatment, the cure takes place in a blinding instant of recognition, or through a quick dose of hypnosis, or through the analyst's authoritative explanation. The doctor becomes "a wonder-worker who is half magician and half supersleuth," as well as an attractive figure ready to fall in love with the patient. These qualities fit the industry's demand for heroic roles tailored to stars. In all, Sward charges, psychoanalysis enables Hollywood to maintain its fantasies. "Could it be that psychology is what the doctor ordered for an industry that has jumpy nerves and hates to part with quite a number of its flights from reality?"[24]

Hollywood picked out other features of Freudian theory to fit its needs. Finding turning points early in characters' lives was no stretch. Even before the psychoanalysis vogue, films showed how childhood events affected an adult's traits, as in *Beau Geste* (1927) and *The Public Enemy* (1931). In considering how to portray Monroe Stahr in *The Love of the Last Tycoon*, Fitzgerald noted, "I must go back into his childhood."[25] Likewise, the long-standing convention of mad villains could be refreshed by appeal to new theories of the mind.[26] The revisionist psychoanalyst Karen Horney argued that Freud had played down the power of guilt feelings. She thought them central to neuroses, and this view proved congenial to Hollywood's dramatic demands.[27] In several films of the cycle, the suffering characters need to be freed from unjustified guilt, a revelation that can do duty for exposure of the properly Freudian sexual drives.

Then there's the larger analogy to solving a mystery. Crime fiction was already exploring psychoanalytic explanations, as in Bruce Hamilton's *Middle-Class Murder* (1938). More overtly, Lawrence Treat's *O as in Omen* (1943) features a protagonist who is both psychiatrist and detective (and who finds clues in his dreams), while Guy Endore's *Methinks the Lady* (1945) centers on a psychiatrist's wife who's a kleptomaniac and lays bare her mental life in two hundred pages of free association.[28] The talking cure can easily be slotted into an interrogation situation, presenting a recounted flashback or dream in the frame provided by a murder case or a trial. A distinguished practitioner called psychoanalysis "an investigative procedure," and Freud himself wrote that the patient's repressed material "cannot rest until the mystery has been solved."[29]

We might conclude with Marc Vernet that in cinema "the major effect of psychoanalysis has been to furnish a new alibi for the structure of American narrative film."[30] Put another way, what was attractive about the psychoanalytic scenario is how easily it permitted switches on flashbacks and dream sequences, those normative devices that satisfy the needs of the larger narrative (exposition, mystery, suspense, emotional involvement). Similarly, Americanized Freud justified upbeat resolutions. Contrary to the master's pessimism about full recovery, Horney argued for the possibility of satisfying the patient's "quest for happiness."[31] Such a theory could motivate crisp climaxes and happy endings. Like amnesia and "innocent" dreams and daydreams, psychoanalysis both fits with and provides cover for Hollywood's preferred manipulations of plot structure and narrational processes.

To some extent the prevailing ideas within American psychoanalysis were already narrativized. Therapy could be conceived as a series of scenes, with the tension rising toward revelation, thanks to the confessional dimension of the talking cure. Robert Lindner's controversial nonfiction book *Rebel without a Cause* (1944) turned the case study of a psychotic convict into a suspenseful drama of self-revelation under hypnosis. But it remained for Hollywood to recast these conventions according to the norms of classical filmmaking. At the same time, just as with perceptual

viewpoint, auditory flashbacks, dreams, and the like, the psychoanalysis trend permitted displays of flashy technique.

THREE PSYCHIATRICALS

What *Variety* called "the psycho film cycle" ran from 1944 to 1950, and it shows the process of schema and revision in tight compass.[32] As narrative devices were borrowed, mixed, and recast, these films nicely display the variorum quality of popular culture, its tendency to ring switches on a premise introduced by one striking film.

That film, in the case of clinical psychoanalysis, was *Lady in the Dark* (1944). A successful fashion magazine editor is in a love affair with a married older man, but she is troubled by indecision. Liza Elliott dresses severely and runs the office with cold efficiency. Her handsome, combative marketing manager Charley Johnson has his eye on her job. Liza reluctantly goes to a psychoanalyst, and in sessions with him she learns some Freudian lessons. Rejected by a frivolous mother and upbraided by a severe father, she decided as a child that she wasn't pretty. As a teenager she was rejected by a boy. Her lover is now revealed as a substitute father, and her psychiatrist advises her to find a man who will dominate her. Now enlightened, Liza invites Charley to coedit the magazine with her, and he promptly takes over her desk. She succumbs to him with a kiss.

The 1941 Broadway play, based on author Moss Hart's years on the couch, might have become a stark psychodrama. Instead Hart contrived a splashy show with Kurt Weill's music, Ira Gershwin's lyrics, dazzling fashions, and a corps of dancers arrayed on turntable sets. The extravaganza was hailed as something new because in place of short musical numbers, it embedded three extensive episodes—Weill called them "one-act operas"—that represented the dreams Liza reports to her analyst.[33] In the film these are huge production numbers. Humans are dwarfed in abstract spaces filled with smoke, crowds, and colossal sets, including a wedding cake the size of a house. Liza's sumptuous, sometimes outlandish dream gowns supposedly show that unconsciously she wants to be glamorous. Her childhood trauma, a moment

when her father thoughtlessly says she'll never be a looker, has led her to repress her feminine yearnings for pretty clothes and to resist subjection to male authority.

The film version of *Lady in the Dark* staked everything on its dream interludes. The spectacle crowded out the more intimate moments in the play, notably the song "My Ship," which became a moderate hit after the play but was never sung in its entirety in the film. The movie did preserve the play's misogyny, though, not least in that Liza's analyst reasserts Charley's complaint that she's made herself cold and masculine. All the analyst adds is a "scientific" explanation. The success of the treatment is rendered in marital terms when Liza says, "I'm getting a divorce from myself."

Hart's own analyst, the distinguished Dr. Lawrence Kubie, didn't hesitate to diagnose Liza's problems: hysteria, narcissism, Oedipal issues, and bisexuality.[34] But it's significant that the film that launches the therapeutic cycle centers not on a ruthless killer like that in *Blind Alley* but rather on a successful, attractive woman who is simply unhappy with her life. Most of the films in the cycle will show how mental illnesses infect apparently law-abiding citizens.

Lady in the Dark runs over two hours and cost over $2 million. The next entry in the cycle runs only sixty-five minutes and was designed by MGM to complement overlong A features on double bills.[35] Arch Oboler based *Bewitched* (1945) on his 1938 radio play "Alter Ego," which dramatizes how a woman's split personality leads her to murder her fiancé. It was, Oboler pointed out, ideal for radio because Joan hallucinates not images but the voice of her other self.[36] Accordingly, the play piled on voice-over narration, inner monologues, and choral montages. The film, constrained by a minuscule budget, uses the same techniques, yielding a somewhat freer play of offscreen voices than we normally find. There are no dreams or flashbacks, not even a posited trauma in Joan's childhood. Oboler upgrades the stylistic presentation with passages of rapid cutting, florid tracking shots, and a special effect at the climax (fig. 8.4).

Oboler's radio play restricted the narration to Joan's range of knowledge, but *Bewitched* widens the perspective to show scenes of others seeking to cure her. These sections help expand the ra-

8.4. *Bewitched* (1945): The two sides of Joan emerge under the psychiatrist's questioning.

dio original to an hour. So do the decisions to turn Joan's attorney into a romantic partner and to add a psychiatrist, who can explain her syndrome, hypnotize her, and exorcise the evil "Karen." In the process, the film gets a happy ending that wasn't present in the original. By positing a character with multiple personality disorder, *Bewitched* looks ahead to *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957) and other psychiatric films of later years.

Completed before *Bewitched* but released a few months afterward, *Spellbound* (1945) became the best-known psychoanalytic film of the era. It offered a variant on *Lady in the Dark*: drama in place of fantasy, murder instead of job dissatisfaction, a more serious maladjustment (amnesia, impersonation, homicidal impulses), and a passionate love affair between female analyst and male patient. Like *Lady*, it boasts of clinical accuracy, in that both screenwriter Ben Hecht and producer David Selznick were undergoing psychoanalysis.[37] The film's prologue title is a popularizing plea for a new science that solves "the emotional problems of the sane"—another signal that psychoanalysis devotes itself to ordinary difficulties, not merely obvious madness.

Spellbound reworks *Lady in the Dark*'s motif of the cold woman. Constance Peterson is a dedicated therapist with no time for flirtation until she is lovestruck at the first sight of John Ballantine. Now the drama is generated from the conflict of clinical objectivity and romantic passion. John believes he has killed the psychiatrist Dr. Edwardes (author of *Labyrinth of the Guilt Complex*), and he fears he may kill Constance during one of his spells. This switch adds the murderous-husband motif to the mix.

The plot enacts a double cure: John cures Constance of fri-

gidity, she frees him from amnesia and repression. John saw Dr. Edwardes shot while skiing with him, and as a result of the trauma he assumed Edwardes's identity. His repression stems from a touch of battle fatigue, along with guilt over a childhood accident in which John killed his brother. More than in *Lady in the Dark*, this psychoanalytic cure assumes the contours of a mystery story. Constance not only must discover the sources of John's symptoms, she must also reveal how Dr. Edwardes died and who the killer is. This detective plot is given urgency by Hitchcock's familiar chase pattern, as Constance and John race ahead of the police.

Both *Lady in the Dark* and *Bewitched* give shape to psychic processes through sound (musical motifs in the one, inner monologue in the other), but *Spellbound* mostly dramatizes John's symptoms through imagery. He is unnerved by fields of pure white and by raked parallels on a tablecloth or bedspread (figs. 8.5 and 8.6). John's dream, a middlebrow version of Dalí and de Chirico, offers a cluster of clues that Constance and her old professor must identify. In place of the billowing mists of typical dream sequences, Hitchcock asked that the dream be in sharp focus (fig. 8.7).[38] His long-standing commitment to pictorial vividness yields images that function as both clues and quasi-poetic associations.

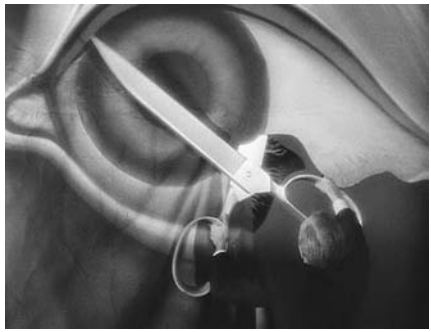
In representing psychic life, *Spellbound* ransacks the bag of current narrative devices, deploying inner monologues, auditory and visual flashbacks, dreams, and hallucinations. Constance's erotic liberation is represented through a motif of doorways (figs. 8.8 and 8.9). Optical subjectivity is pushed to a limit when a hand holding a pistol swivels toward the audience and the blast is illuminated in a burst of red. No less flashy is Miklós Rózsa's score, which mixes soaring lyricism with the eerie harmonics of the theremin. By surpassing the stagy dream pageants of *Lady in the Dark* and the low-tech radio dramatics of *Bewitched*, *Spellbound*'s flashy style raised the bar for later psychiatricals.

VARIORUM DELIRIUM

Across the four years following *Spellbound*, filmmakers would present, in two or three films a year, crazy men and crazy ladies.

8.5. *Spellbound* (1945): John is disturbed when Constance draws grooves with a fork.

8.6. Hitchcock anticipates the parallel-line motif in the first scene when a patient rakes her nails over an attendant's hand.



8.7. Unlike many dream sequences of the 1940s, *Spellbound*'s is rendered with aggressive clarity (compare fig. 8.3).

8.8. After optical POV shots of the closed door of John's study, doors open magically in Constance's mind when she kisses him.

8.9. The motif becomes grim when the barred prison doors open to admit John.

These wounded heroes and heroines are akin to the protagonists of novels like *The Lost Weekend* (1945), Virginia Perdue's *Alarum and Excursion* (1944), Shelly Smith's *Come and Be Killed* (1947), and John Franklin Bardin's *Devil Take the Blue-Tail Fly* (1948). The men are often plagued by combat neuroses, the women by domestic tension, and all by traumas, either early or recent. Most are involved in crime, and some wind up in asylums. They undergo hypnosis, the talking cure, or injections of "truth serum." Above all, their stories consist of varied blends of the new conventions, aided by fresh strategies governing the range and depth of the narration.

For example, *High Wall* (1947) presents a variant on *Spellbound*. A war vet, finding his wife in an affair, passes out as he's about to strangle her. Like *Spellbound*'s John Ballantine, he assumes that during his blackout he committed murder. The switcheroo on the *Spellbound* situation comes when, in the sanatorium, he comes to suspect that he's innocent and must convince his female psychiatrist of it. Instead of *Spellbound*'s reconstruction from the patient's viewpoint, the gap in the vet's memory is filled in by the killer, who recounts a flashback revealing what really happened.

High Wall replaces childhood trauma with combat fatigue and the discovery of a wife's unfaithfulness. A comparable "recent trauma" triggers the action of *Shock* (1946). A bride waiting for her husband in a hotel room witnesses a murder in a nearby building. Primed by an anxiety dream about losing her husband, she falls into catatonia. The plot goes on to reveal the murderer as a psychiatrist who dispatches the young woman to his asylum. The biggest variation is that the narration goes on to restrict us almost wholly to the culprits, the weak-willed doctor and his steely nursemistress. They try to use hypnosis to eradicate the wife's memory, but when they fail, they seek to convince her and her husband that she's delusional. In later portions of *Shock*, the villainous psychiatrist suffers auditory flashbacks and other mental agonies.

The opening stretch of *Whirlpool* (1950) likewise restricts the narration to the patient and a homicidal therapist, but here her neurosis (kleptomania, as in *The Locket*) is exploited to attack her husband, another psychoanalyst. Hypnotized, she's maneuvered

into a frame-up for murder. After the wife is arrested, the narrational weight shifts to the husband's efforts to clear her and prove his rival guilty. The resolution comes when her husband admits he accepted the role of her tyrannical father, and this frees her from the hypnotic spell.

Before this, at the end of the development section, the wife recalls the childhood episode that compels her to steal. In a departure from forties convention, she painfully roots out that episode without benefit of auditory or visual flashbacks, a pyrotechnical dream sequence, or a musical score. In an era of flamboyant subjectivity, *Whirlpool*'s willfully flat presentation, putting the entire onus on Gene Tierney's performance in a static long take, produces a kind of minimalist switcheroo, as well as being characteristic of Otto Preminger's directorial style.

Thirty or so features of the era based their plots on twins, with *Two-Faced Woman* (1941), *A Stolen Life* (1946), and *The Dark Mirror* (1946) being the best remembered. The last of these transfers the convention to a psychiatrical. It starts as a classic detective story, attaching us to police investigating a murder. Once they discover that twin sisters are involved, the moving-spotlight narration alternates among the investigation, the twins' domestic life, and sessions with a therapist assisting the police. The twins device motivates reviving the bipolarity of *Bewitched*, with one sister using the other to cover her crime. (The doctor who's been murdered diagnosed his patient as having a split personality.) At the climax, the wicked twin (the "dark mirror") impersonates the virtuous one, but the analyst, in love with the good sister, can detect the difference. As in *Whirlpool*, there are no dreams or flashbacks to put us in the mind of either twin; the emphasis falls as much on the easygoing doctor's Rorschach inkblot and word-association tests as on the sisters as personifications of a divided psyche.

If *Whirlpool* is distinctive for its sobriety, *Possessed* (1947) stands out for its bravado. Unlike most films of the cycle, it tries to show the gradual development of a psychosis. Two viewpoints are counterposed. Doctors in the frame story use narcosynthesis to probe the mind of the catatonic Louise Howell, while Louise numbly tells her story in lengthy flashbacks. There's no childhood trauma to be excavated. We must accept that the perpetu-

ally unhappy Louise is so desperate for someone to love that she's thrown off balance when the cynical womanizer David Sutton pulls away from her. This, somewhat like the combat neurosis of John in *Spellbound*, provides the precondition for the real shock: the suicide of the embittered wife whom Louise has been attending as a live-in nurse. Louise blames herself for being away from the lake house when Pauline Graham killed herself.

The plot traces Louise's descent into schizophrenia. Louise marries Dean, Pauline's husband, but his daughter Carol voices her mother's suspicion that Louise had an affair with Dean. When David becomes Carol's fiancé, Louise's jealousy combines with her guilt about Pauline's suicide to drive her into madness. In effect, she becomes as paranoid as Pauline was.

Director Curtis Bernhardt uses all the resources of the era to convey Louise's disintegration. The sound technique modulates scrupulously. The bedridden wife Pauline is never shown, only heard through a squawking intercom in the kitchen and her offscreen complaints. As Louise becomes more unbalanced, we and she think she imagines Pauline summoning her, but actually the offscreen voice is real and belongs to Carol. Another step downward comes when Louise hears household noises as frighteningly loud. Returning to the lake house and severely shaken, she sinks into all-out delusion when she hears the buzzer's summons and the dead Pauline calling for her, distorted by Sonovox electronics.

Nearly all the film is restricted to Louise's range of knowledge, and optical POV techniques are used with unusual rigor. Early on she's brought into the hospital on a gurney, and that moment is rendered as her optical viewpoint. It's a bravura tracking shot, but it plays a role in a pattern. There are no other optical POV angles until Louise fantasizes that the dead Pauline is summoning her upstairs. Again we're in her place approaching the bedroom, but now through a rough handheld shot, a rarity in a 1940s film. The shakiness evokes her nervous fear of what she will find. At the climax, when Louise shoots David to keep him from marrying Carol, we get her POV on his astonished face. Unlike Hitchcock, who shares out optically subjective shots among minor characters, Bernhardt reserves them for key points in Louise's drama.

The most original moment in the film involves a flagrant trick. Tense from a concert evening in which David has been flirting with Carol, Louise returns home. From the upper landing she sees Carol and David kissing good night and mocking her. After a quarrel, Louise shoves the girl down the stairs. Louise then watches in horror as Carol's body vanishes. She, like us, realizes that the killing has been a fantasy; the impression is confirmed when Carol and David return innocently from their evening. Lacking the conventional subjective signaling, like misty framings or distorted sound, this scene powerfully insinuates us into Louise's mind. But it also asks to be appreciated as a piece of bold artifice and a vivid precursor of all those scenes in modern films that trick us by revealing, quickly or eventually, that something that seemed real is only imaginary.

The film's Hitchcockian precision of style works on a tale with a far bleaker upshot than *Spellbound*. At the close of *Possessed*, Louise remains catatonic, with many months of therapy ahead. Worse, she will be tried for murder, although the doctor believes she can plead insanity. Viewers expecting a glimmer of hope will be disappointed, as our last view shows her still comatose, with her husband helplessly taking her hand. A close-up response—eyelids fluttering, her hand squeezing his—is denied us.[39] The doctor has compared her psychosis to demonic possession. It echoes the supernatural implications of *Bewitched*, but the exorcism, if it is to come, is far off. Of all the psycho cycle, this tale of a hysterical woman and her obtuse men is the most pessimistic.

TRAUMA AND THERAPY

When the trauma does get shown, the filmmakers face choices about where to put it. *Shock* puts it very early; *High Wall* postpones it to the midpoint. *Possessed* presents Louise's reaction to Pauline's suicide at the end of the setup, about thirty minutes in. *The Locket* inserts its recounted trauma at about the same point. By contrast, *Spellbound* exposes the childhood death in a flashback at the climax. Wherever the traumatic incident comes, however,

8.10. *The Snake Pit* (1948): As the psychiatrist explains, we get rapid replays of scenes from earlier flashbacks, often showing that Virginia found her father . . .

8.11. . . . in the men she met later in life.

the character's full illumination is saved for the very end. It may be induced by therapy, by new information, or, as in *The Locket*, by a crisis that shatters the neurotic's facade.

Medical professionals criticized the abruptness of such awakenings, so perhaps for that reason *The Snake Pit* (1948) presents its heroine's stay in an asylum as a series of slowly improving psychiatric sessions. Lacking a crime to be solved, the film must inject drama and conflict into the heroine's gradual recovery. Part of the interest comes from her exchanges with other patients. At the same time, the main plot replaces the customary crime pretext by a series of probes into her past that become linked as an explanation slowly emerges.

Even before Virginia Cunningham tells her story, her doctor gets her husband's report of her slide into psychotic depression. That conversation yields the first of eight flashbacks, some arranged out of chronological order and others presenting replays of events Virginia's mind returns to with new understanding. A cluster of associations—two dolls from her childhood that reappear in adulthood, a fiancé who resembles her father, the unconscious belief that she caused the deaths of others—are brought to light in a virtuosic stretch of crosscutting that emphasizes parallels (figs. 8.10 and 8.11). Coming at the end of the cycle, the film's narration benefits from the new conventions of psychological causality. It's likely that the swift, elliptical exposition of Vir-

ginia's father fixation and her guilt feelings wouldn't have been easily understood by the audience a few years earlier.[40]

As if in response to the delirious passages in earlier psychiatricals, Anatole Litvak, who produced as well as directed, wanted to minimize subjective montages.[41] He included one, induced by Virginia's brutal questioning by a staff member, but mostly the film relies on inner monologue. *The Snake Pit* begins with a *Possessed*-style trick. A close shot shows Virginia seeming to respond to an offscreen doctor's question, only to reveal that it is part of a conversation in her mind. In an echo of *Bewitched*, one scene presents a mental quarrel between two sides of her personality; another scene yields her inner monologue as a child. When she is finally released and heading home, the voices in her head go quiet.

Virginia's recovery has setbacks and diversions. Playing up the rigors of electroshock therapy in almost horror-film imagery, the plot favors narcosynthesis and the talking cure, but these treatments are shown as imperfect. The therapy's results are treated with surprising tentativeness. Virginia's analyst convinces her they can't uncover everything that led to her psychosis, but she does understand some sources of her feelings. In doing so, Virginia is able to help more severely afflicted patients. The final sections of the film show that once she starts back toward mental health, she serves as a comforting friend to a woman in a catatonic trance. At first utterly isolated from the others ("Am I like them?") she comes to see her kinship with them. For all its oversimplification, *The Snake Pit* seeks to distinguish itself by avoiding a crime-based premise and by portraying the difficulty and precariousness of regaining stability.

Studio head Darryl F. Zanuck commented in a memo that the voice-over passages, often mixing question-and-answer between Virginia and her doctor, gave the film the air of a semidocumentary.[42] The film's seriousness and authenticity were attested to by three psychiatrists consulted during production, along with testimonials from several others on the film's release. The title may appear sensationalist, but it implies social criticism by comparing the sanatorium, in which many doctors and nurses have given up

trying to cure their patients, to the medieval pits where the insane were flung. Accordingly, *The Snake Pit* could be positioned as part of the prestigious "problem picture" cycle of the period.

The playwright Arthur Laurents, who worked uncredited on the film, had already launched his career with a 1946 social problem play that possessed a vivid psychoanalytic dimension. In 1949 *Home of the Brave* became a film that did the same.[43] Unlike the films with female patients that stress accepting men's dominion, the all-male *Home of the Brave* stresses equality by making its patient the victim of racism.

Like *The Snake Pit*, *Home of the Brave* sets up the problem through an observer's flashback. Black soldier Peter Moss is suffering from amnesia and has paralyzed legs. His commanding officer explains to the unit psychiatrist that Moss, along with three white soldiers, accepted a four-day scouting mission to a Japanese-occupied island. While there, something happened that traumatized Moss. The psychiatrist injects Moss with a truth serum, and in a series of his flashbacks the story unfolds.

We learn of Moss's happy high-school days shared with Finch, one of the other soldiers on the assignment. Then we trace the mission in two lengthy flashbacks with minimal voice-over explanation. During the team's stay on the island, bigotry bursts out. One soldier, T. J., is an unreconstructed racist, and in a moment of tension Finch calls Moss "nigger." Finch is shot retrieving a map case Moss left behind, so Moss feels responsible. At one point the anxiety becomes so great that Moss, left alone to wait for Finch, falls to his knees, reliving his humiliation by crying out, "Nigger, nigger." Later, Finch dies in Moss's arms. As Moss digs Finch's grave, his legs become paralyzed. He regains their use back in the present when the doctor indulges in a piece of brutal therapy. He snaps, "You dirty nigger, get up and walk!"

Once more, guilt needs to be lifted from the patient's shoulders. During the customary wrap-up analysis, the doctor emphasizes that it's normal for soldiers to suffer survivor guilt. Mingo, the steadiest soldier on the mission, confesses he felt glad when a bullet hit someone else. Moss realizes his feelings aren't unique; as both a soldier and a black man, "I'm just like anyone else."

Mental problems afflict all men. The lesson is that racism can inflict psychic wounds, but psychoanalysis can help heal them.

It's fitting, then, that near the end of this cycle Columbia could remake 1939's *Blind Alley* in a social problem mode. *The Dark Past* (1949) underscores the healing mission of the psychiatrist, who's now a police physician exploring the sources of crime. While reusing the first version's negative-footage dream sequence (which still looks suitably showy), the narration adds characteristic 1940s techniques. The central home invasion is framed by the psychiatrist's voice-over in a semidocumentary vein, and the central action, his confrontation with the escaped convict, is a lengthy flashback that consumes most of the running time. He tells the tale to persuade a cop to give a young juvenile delinquent some psychiatric treatment. *The Dark Past* suggests that some apparent incorrigibles can be saved by psychiatric care.

The speed with which the psychiatricals generated so many variations supports Jean-Claude Carrière's comment that filmmakers forge "forms of expression which briefly seem daring but quickly become commonplace." These films show how far writers and directors, caught up in a benevolent arms race, were willing to go in presenting new forms of subjectivity. And the industry encouraged the escalation. *Variety* noted as early as 1947 apropos of *Possessed* that "psychiatric stuff is old hat by now, but this one will mop up."[44]

Joe Gillis in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) defended his script *Dark Windows*: "Psychopaths sell like hotcakes." Yet the fashion was actually fading. Psychoanalysis remained fodder for Broadway, television, and nightclub comedians, but influential therapeutic films would not make a comeback until *The Cobweb* (1955) and *Fear Strikes Out* (1957). These initiated what two historians have called the golden age of film psychiatry.[45]

The flagging of the trend, though, shouldn't make us forget its crucial importance for Hollywood storytelling. Subjectivity in all its forms is as much a marker of 1940s cinema as are flashbacks and voice-over narration. For all their evasiveness and gimmickry, the dream and neurosis films exemplify the larger

process of assimilating new narrative possibilities and pushing them forward, sometimes recklessly. Once the senses and the mind were made central parts of filmic storytelling, once optical and auditory perception opened the way to inner monologue and dreams and memory, hallucinations could come in as well. With psychology, anything goes. The task was to subject these expanding possibilities, from other films and adjacent media, to the pressure of a resourceful storytelling tradition.

INTERLUDE

Innovation by Misadventure

IN MOST FORTIES FILMS, TECHNIQUES HARMONIZE. A FILMmaker could fall back on the precepts of classical continuity storytelling. Filmmakers who tried out some of the newer schemas had to reconfigure things to create a coherent whole. Most succeeded.

But despite the checks and balances of Hollywood production, a final release might reveal confusions. Unresolved conflicts during production might yield offbeat results, as with the asymmetrical voice-overs in *Laura* (1944). At other times, filmmakers who wanted to try something new might need to change course, and hasty workarounds would follow. The results may seem discordant on the screen, but they highlight the new storytelling strategies—and attract connoisseurs of narrative peculiarity.

FLASHBACKS TO THE RESCUE

For the biopic *The Great Moment* (1944), Preston Sturges felt forced to utilize flashbacks. The protagonist William Morton, the man who discovered ether's effectiveness as an anesthetic, sank into poverty. "Dr. Morton's life," Sturges observed, "was a very bad piece of dramatic construction. He had a few months of excitement ending in triumph and twenty years of disillusionment, boredom, and increasing bitterness." The film would have "to

change the order of presentation," since "to have a play you must have a climax and it is better not to have the climax right at the beginning."[1]

The problem was how to arrange the flashbacks. Sturges originally planned start the film after Morton's death. The first flashback would trace Morton's decline late in life, while the second would jump back to trace his process of discovery. At the climax of the second flashback, Morton shares his secret with the world. Sturges had wanted to conclude the film with a return to the mournful present, when his wife and friend lament his years of failure. This would cap the film's thesis: that pioneers are often unappreciated by the people they benefit.

But the supervising Paramount producer, worried about this unorthodox structure, recut the film. Sturges's two long flashback blocks are more or less retained, the first showing Morton's failing health late in life, the second showing his youthful triumph. And each of these is introduced by present-time framing showing his widow and old friend recalling his career. But the finished film did not return to the framing situation, omitting Sturges's downbeat epilogue. As a result, the film concludes with Morton's sharing his discovery with the world, and the plot never returns us to the present. Like *How Green Was My Valley*, *The Great Moment* forgets its grim framing narration in order to provide uplifting final moments.

More radically, the producer shifted the immediate aftermath of Morton's triumph to the opening credit sequence. This version creates a circular structure: the first action we see, Morton paraded through the streets, follows directly from the final scene of the film. On *The Great Moment*, production clashes created inadvertent innovation, what later filmmakers would call a flashforward.[2]

One of the biggest studio disasters of the 1940s was MGM's *Desire Me* (1947). The project was plagued by cast replacements, script rewrites, and a location accident: Greer Garson was injured when a wave engulfed her. The first director, George Cukor, quit in disgust, and it was reported that 80 percent of the project was reshot. The film was finished piecemeal by other directors, and all refused to have their names attached, so the film bears no di-

IM.1. *Desire Me* (1947): Aubet and Renaud talk of Marise, but the framing suppresses their faces. Even the shot/reverse-shots that follow this conceal each man's mouth when he speaks.

rector's credit. The mishaps pushed the budget to an unrecoverable $4 million.

Desire Me's thirty-three drafts (!) of scripts and partial scripts reveal the variorum principle at work behind the scenes. Yet all the confusion created some intriguing novelty. Apart from some usual 1940s techniques—an overarching frame story, flashbacks within flashbacks, moving-spotlight narration—two scenes stand out by dint of sheer peculiarity, and these bear the traces of putting off final decisions until postproduction.

The first instance occurs when two POWs are lying on their bellies at night. Paul Aubert has talked endlessly of his wife Marise, and his companion Jean Renaud has developed a fixation on her. This scene consists of Paul softly singing the couple's favorite song and showing Jean a photo of Marise (fig. IM.1). The whole scene strategically conceals the men's faces when they speak. Near the end of production, notes for retakes specify the premise of the camp scene: "We cannot distinguish which man is Paul and which is Jean, since we cannot see their lips move as they speak the almost whispered voice." Making sure we can't see the men's faces allows for later adjustments in the dialogue, and these are noted in a final script draft.

Even stranger, Paul's voice-over continues as the scene changes to war's aftermath. On the sound track he tells Jean how he'll return to Marise—jumping off a truck, returning to their cottage, savoring the sight of the familiar household. But the sequence accompanying this commentary shows not Paul but Jean doing all these things. The war has ended, and for reasons not yet

explained, Jean has taken over Paul's life. Later we'll learn that Jean has left Paul to die in an escape attempt.

Most voice-over passages, such as that of Waldo in *Laura*, are situated in a sort of virtual present, the narrative now, while the images belong to the past. In *Desire Me*, the voice-over belongs to the past, as a continuation of the nighttime dialogue between the men, while the images belong to the narrative present.

Several voice-over options were considered. They range from Jean's auditory flashbacks over his arrival to a garbled voice that emerges from the sea. Some script drafts maintain uncertainty about whose voice is heard. The notes for retakes list three versions of the voice-over in parallel columns under the heading "Narration to be redone." In all, the unusual techniques on display in *Desire Me* are a compromise born of two years spent fiddling with expository alternatives.[3]

PERCHANCE TO DREAM

Dream sequences can be used for characterization, prophecies, or suspense. These passages were typically signaled by showing the dreamer in bed, often thrashing around, while also presenting the images and sounds of the dream. As we've seen, though, some films did not signal that the protagonist had fallen asleep. With *Strange Impersonation* (1946), that trick is fairly smoothly integrated into a plot of mistaken identity. Other films' and-then-I-woke-up resolutions were the result of production uncertainties and censorship clashes.

Nunnally Johnson, screenwriter of *The Woman in the Window* (1944), favored an ending where the homicidal protagonist commits suicide, as in the book. Director Fritz Lang and a Universal supervisor argued for a denouement in which the murder was merely dreamed. The studio launched the film with a plea for audiences not to divulge the ending, and critics urged viewers to see the film from the beginning.[4] Despite controversy, *The Woman in the Window* was Lang's biggest success. The dream gimmick, he claimed, added a million dollars to the box office.[5]

The Strange Affair of Uncle Harry (1945) suffered more severe behind-the-scenes disputes. Universal test-screened five end-

ings. According to the studio, respondents overwhelmingly preferred the dream device,[6] but critics by and large didn't approve.[7] The *New York Times* reviewer registered his annoyance by giving away the endings of both *Uncle Harry* and *Woman in the Window*. "This business—compelled by the Hays Office—of having murderers dream their crimes is becoming extremely aggravating."[8]

A dream came to the rescue in roundabout, surrealistic ways in *The Chase* (1946). The Cornell Woolrich source novel, *The Black Path of Fear* (1944), begins in a crisis situation. Chuck Scott enters a Havana club with an American woman. As they kiss she is stabbed to death, and he is the prime suspect. He escapes from police questioning and takes refuge in the tenement apartment of another woman. Scott recounts his backstory in a brief flashback. He has worked as chauffeur for a Miami racketeer, Eddie Roman, and has run off to Cuba with Roman's wife. After Chuck finishes his flashback, he sets out to find the people who have murdered his woman and framed him.

Woolrich's novel killed off the heroine and left the protagonist to brood on his loss. For the film, producer Seymour Nebenzal wanted to keep the woman alive for a happy ending. An early draft of the film dared a bold revision of 1940s dream schemas.[9]

In this version Gino, Roman's right-hand man, has followed the couple to Cuba. Scott's pursuit of Lorna's killer leads him to a confrontation with Gino. During the fight, Scott is killed. Abruptly we shift to Scott's Miami bedroom, and we see him wake up. The film's first fifty minutes—Havana adventure, Lorna's death, flashback to the story's start, fatal fight with Gino—have all been Scott's dream.

This version of *The Chase* would have offered a peculiar mix of two typical schemas, the dream and the flashback. The Miami events, except for the couple's escape, are actual, but they would have formed a block embedded within the purely imagined Havana adventure. Many movie dreams recall real actions in the story, but typically we're aware we're watching a dream. *The Chase* would have presented the dream and the flashback as equally real. To further disorient us, the film would have begun inside the dream, without an opening frame.

Perhaps the success of *The Woman in the Window*, directed

IM.2. *The Chase* (1946): Scott rests before rescuing Lorna.

IM.3. Scott awakes: The rescue has been a dream.

by Nebenzal's old colleague Fritz Lang, encouraged this revision of the it-was-all-a-dream strategy. But after most of the film was shot, Nebenzal thought better of it.[10] He moved the Miami flashback to the front, making it a conventional setup. He accordingly shot an opening frame to launch Scott's Havana dream adventure (figs. IM.2 and IM.3).

In the process, the filmmakers created the sort of seamless continuity that can be understood retrospectively as hinting at a dream to come. On the night of the couple's planned escape, Scott lies down to read a newspaper. Fade out. Fade in on Eddie in his dressing gown listening to a phonograph record. Gino comes to Scott's room and finds him gone. As the recorded music continues, we are taken to a ship, where in a stateroom Scott is playing the same tune on a piano: an auditory hook. Lorna is with him, and they are evidently on their way to freedom. Presumably all this material, except for Scott on his bed, would have been in his flashback during the Cuba episode.

In retrospect, we can see hints that the trip and the Havana events are subjective. The light falling on Lorna and Scott in their cabin is markedly unrealistic. "Forget time," Scott tells Lorna, and the song the couple dance to in the club contains the line, "Like the stars in a dream song." When Commander Davidson, Scott's old naval physician, asks how it all began, he replies, "There doesn't seem to be any beginning"—as if acknowledging the surreptitious segue into his dream.

Even in this less radical form, *The Chase* revises the and-

IM.4. Within the dream, Gino finds Scott gone. The beer bottle and discarded newspaper reaffirm the "reality" of the scene because . . .

IM.5. . . . an earlier, real-world scene of Scott rising included the same props.

then-I-woke-up schema in an intriguing way. The other films in the cycle keep the narration attached to the dreamer before and after the transition; that is, the dream's first scene shows us the dreamer continuing to act. But the first scenes in Scott's dream feature not Scott but Eddie and Gino. We accept this shift of attachment partly because the film's narration has from the start been fairly unrestricted, crosscutting between Scott and Eddie. Soon the images confirm the "objectivity" of the sequence in a more devious fashion (figs. IM.4 and IM.5).

By dropping the flashback structure and stitching the Havana dream into the Miami action, Nebenzal didn't solve more basic problems. How could the story continue after Scott wakes up? Once the dream is done, what would stop him from fulfilling the escape plan by grabbing Lorna and fleeing to the ship? The answer: amnesia. The dream has triggered the return of Scott's war trauma. Forgetting he promised to help Lorna escape, even forgetting he's Eddie's chauffeur, Scott runs to his naval doctor for help.

To bring Scott out of his amnesia, the plot has recourse to coincidence. Davidson takes Scott to a restaurant for a drink. In stroll Eddie and Gino, having locked Lorna up at home. As Davidson chats with Eddie, Scott finds the tickets to Havana in his pocket and remembers more. Rushing to Eddie's mansion, he breaks in, helps Lorna escape, and books passage on another ship. Eddie learns of their plan and races to the pier, but his car is struck by a train. The epilogue shows Scott and Lorna nuzzling one another

IM.6. Lorna, locked up by Eddie, seems abandoned, but . . .

IM.7. . . . as if by a miracle, Scott starts to remember her.

outside the Havana nightclub as Scott says, "We'll be together forever."

During these scenes, Scott seems to have developed psychic powers. When Eddie learns that Lorna wants to leave, he beats her and locks her in. Dissolve from her sobbing on the floor to Scott at the bar, staring into space and remembering her name (figs. IM.6 and IM.7). Immediately after we see Eddie's car smashed by the train, Scott, waiting with Lorna in a ship's cabin that recalls the dream flight, is seized by a calm confidence, as if he intuited their salvation. "It doesn't matter now." From that moment we shift to the two kissing in the carriage outside the Havana club.

The fairly slapdash final stretch of trauma, recuperation, and second sight were in the original screenplay. So too was a scene after Eddie and Gino have been killed on the highway: Scott and Lorna safe in their cabin, this time really headed for Havana. But instead of a romantic shipboard reconciliation, Nebenzal added the odd epilogue showing Eddie and Lorna in the carriage outside the club. By providing this Havana tag, the film raises the question, How can the real nightclub we see in the epilogue's happy ending be the same one Scott dreams earlier, complete with the same carriage driver?

The question becomes more pressing because the carriage shots in the dream and in the story reality are uncannily similar. Clearly the filmmakers reused Havana footage to supply the tag (figs. IM.8 and IM.9). Maybe they thought audiences wouldn't notice the near-identity with the earlier scene and would just

IM.8. In the dream: The couple embrace outside the Havana club.

IM.9. In reality: The same carriage, the same club, the same embrace.

take it as Hollywood's familiar "here we go again" tactic. But the results are disconcerting. This precise replay, which feels like a flashback itself, gives Scott's dream the power of prophecy. Or perhaps this last scene, in a sort of Buñuelian recursion, starts the dream over again and leads to the same fate for Lorna.

The dream may have taken away Scott's immediate memory of his affair with Lorna, but it has given him an uncanny power over the narrative. He can sense Lorna's captivity at the climax, intuit Eddie's offscreen death, and revisit in reality the scene of passion and murder he imagined. Were these associations fully intended by the filmmakers? Say rather that by jamming together, somewhat desperately, characteristic 1940s devices—flashback, amnesia, dream (prophetic or obsessive), forced happy end—*The Chase* invites us into a maze of alternative stories.

A PATCHWORK OF POSES

The Chase masks the shift to Scott's dream, but subjective passages can be no less problematic when they're signaled explicitly. A striking example is *The Guilt of Janet Ames* (1947). Hailed by *Variety* reviews as "a patchwork of poses, neuroses and psychoses," it offered "ambiguous explorations into modernistic fantasy."[11] It remains one of the oddest "nervous A" pictures of the era.

At its core it tells of two people plagued by postwar guilt. Janet Ames's husband David has died in combat, and in the depths of her psyche she blames herself for not having made his life worth-

while. She denied David's every wish—a home, a challenging job, children—because, finally, she didn't really love him. But she has projected her sense of guilt outward, to blame the men in his squad who survived the war. David flung himself onto a grenade to save them, but were their lives worth it? She suspects not and sets out to find them. One of the survivors is Smitty Cobb, a prize-winning reporter. As David's commanding officer, he ordered David to sacrifice himself for the others. Smitty's own sense of guilt has led, after his return to peacetime, to alcoholism and unemployment.

All these hidden guilts are revealed in the strangest do-it-yourself psychoanalysis among all the Crazy Lady films. In the first scene, Janet is crossing to a tavern where one of David's comrades works. She's struck by a car and taken to a hospital. She's unhurt, but hysterical paralysis has seized her legs, and she can't walk. When reporters find Smitty's name on her list of targets, he's summoned to the hospital to meet with her. He promises to tell Janet about each of the men she wanted to visit. He will present "vivid word pictures" of each one.

But instead of portraits of the men, we get a string of four scenes in which Janet visits them. Are these figments of her imagination? Not completely, because in voice-over she and Smitty talk about what is happening, as if both are watching the film along with us. How can the narration justify giving flesh-and-blood characters the sort of omniscience granted to angels in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1947)?

Early in the film Smitty and a bartender discuss Peter Ibbetson. He is the character in George du Maurier's 1891 novel who, even in prison, could dwell in his imagination, escaping "the limitations of time and space." This literary parallel motivates the premise that Janet in her wheelchair can mentally visit David's far-flung comrades. But the film also draws on a second aspect of du Maurier's tale: that a man and a woman could sustain their love by entering one another's dreams. Peter and Mary telepathically escape to a world where they are perpetually young. It's this supernatural side of the Ibbetson tale that the film exploits. It posits a shared fantasy, guided by Smitty in order to expose Janet's guilt for stunting David's life.

To map out the fantasies, the film employs block construction. In the first vision Janet mentally visits a veteran who, with his girlfriend, dreams of building a house. In the second she meets a wife who has encouraged her husband, another on David's team, to pursue the job he desires. The third fantasy introduces her to a widower who is raising a daughter alone. Each of these confrontations breaks Janet down a little more, until she is forced to confront the fact that the survivors are finding the specific occasions for happiness that she denied to David.

How Smitty knows she is vulnerable on these points—since he constructs the conditions of each mininarrative—we aren't told. Even stranger is the manner of presentation. The problem was to render the visions abstractly while distinguishing them from one another. Accordingly, each vision is handled in a different cinematic style (figs. IM.10—IM.13).

With the fourth and final vision the film becomes still more disjointed. In the present-tense framing scene Janet has her breakthrough and admits that the men are not to blame for David's death. She has also fallen in love with Smitty. So the last "word picture" takes them to a fashionable nightclub as a wealthy couple. There they meet the fourth member of David's squad, who is auditioning for a job as a stand-up comedian. His act, against all credibility, is a satire on psychoanalytic films.

Adopting a German accent, the comic (played over the top by Sid Caesar) portrays a psychiatrist working as a consultant on Hollywood movies (fig. IM.14).[12] He runs through the conventions of the Freudian film, including childhood flashbacks, traumatic incidents, and the use of truth serum to induce free association. Both Janet and Smitty are delighted, perhaps partly because the monologue seems to confirm the telepathic Ibbetson motif: the fake psychoanalyst says, "In my picture I show that the mind is everything and the body is nothing." But the couple doesn't seem to register the act's mockery of the very premises of their relationship. As a review commented, "Caesar draws a biting satire on the psychological film cycle that makes for a choice criticism of 'Janet Ames' itself."[13]

That criticism is forgotten when, now that Janet is cured, the plot turns to Smitty's survivor guilt. Despite their shared love,

IM.10. *The Guilt of Janet Ames* (1947): Smitty's first "word picture": A visit to a nightclub in pseudo-Expressionist mode.

IM.11. Next Smitty takes Janet's imagination to a desert home, filmed as if on an abstract stage set.

IM.12. In a pastiche of silent-film imagery, with softened textures and vignetting around the edges, Janet visits a widower and his daughter.

IM.13. The final "word picture": A trip to a swanky nightclub, filmed in sparkling high key.

IM.14. During the nightclub visit, the standup comedian satirizes movies about psychoanalysis.

Smitty rejects her. Sourly he confesses that all the monitored visions he conjured up for Janet were lies. The surviving veterans are leading sordid, empty lives: everything we have seen has been sugar-coated fantasy. (Here's how the stylizations of the "word pictures" are motivated.) Smitty reveals to Janet that he ordered David to sacrifice himself. "I killed your husband."

Now Janet plays therapist herself. She forgives Smitty and even constructs an alternative version of events (not dramatized) in which a suicidal David flung himself on the grenade. "He had nothing to live for." The film ends with a tight shot of Janet embracing Smitty and murmuring that they will cure each other's guilt. Smitty will find a job, they will have a house. . . . As her consoling words trail off, we realize that she's doing what Smitty did, providing word pictures that will lead him to psychological adjustment.

By the time a psychiatrist enters the drama, Smitty has already led Janet to accept her guilt and decide to move on. In outline, *The Guilt of Janet Ames* follows the therapeutic model laid down in *Spellbound*, right down to the idea of the therapist falling in love with the patient. But this film dissolves the boundary between the patient's memories/fantasies and the therapist's guiding discourse. Instead of revelatory dreams or flashbacks we get a string of telepathic audiovisual aids set up by a cunning master of ceremonies, who's bent on breaking down the patient's defenses. In turn, that dream weaver is an alcoholic tormented by his own guilt, which needs the only absolution that will work: the one provided by the patient. The shared guilt of analyst and patient creates a mutual therapy that a professional could not supply.

In the era's dynamic of creative competition, this psychiatrical tries to outdo rival films by turning dreams and memories into shared visions. The film acknowledges its own efforts, however clumsy, to add to the cycle. "It's an old story," Smitty says when he takes out the newspaper clipping of Janet he carries around with him. "I'm just writing the finish on it." At the same time, Sid Caesar's shtick offers a strangely detached attack on the film and its tradition. The film presents something of a hodgepodge, a fantasia on motifs that by 1947 were quickly becoming conventional.

As with the directorial roundelay on *Desire Me*, the producers on *Janet Ames* refused to be credited.[14]

The Chase, *The Guilt of Janet Ames*, and their counterparts typify an era that encouraged risky storytelling choices. Filmmakers pushed the emerging conventions of time shifts, dreams, voice-over, and psychological probing in daring directions. In the process, they gave us glimpses of a wild territory that looks surprisingly modern. The broken-backed flashbacks of the original *Great Moment* would be perfectly welcome today, as would the floating dialogue passages of *Desire Me*, which uncannily anticipate the unanchored character musings of *The Thin Red Line* (1998). The shared "word pictures" of *Janet Ames* aren't far from the collaborative dreaming of *Inception* (2010), while the looped structure of *The Chase*, in both its original and its final forms, calls to mind the multivalent hallucinations of *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

When forties filmmakers strayed into these regions, they or their superiors often pulled back. They resorted to quick fixups, which sometimes made the films more eccentric. Today's directors and screenwriters venture into this realm with greater calculation. But our familiarity with modern methods gives the old films, with all their misjudgments, a fascination they didn't have back then.

CHAPTER 9

From the Naked City to Bedford Falls

"Fantasies don't make money," Cohn stated flatly.

"But, Harry," [George Axelrod] protested, "you made a brilliant picture right here at your studio, *Here Comes Mr. Jordan*. It was a fantasy, and it made a lot of money."

"Sure," came the reply with Cohnian logic, "but think how much more it would have made if it hadn't been a fantasy!"[1]

FOR THE MOST PART, THE NARRATIVE SCHEMAS I'VE BEEN tracing spill across genres. Multiple protagonists, flashbacks, moving-spotlight narration, and plunges into memory and dreams were options available to any type of film. There could be psychoanalytic Westerns (*Pursued*), therapeutic musicals (*Lady in the Dark*), deeply subjective horror stories (*Dead Man's Eyes*), hallucinatory romances (*Possessed*), and family sagas rendered in mournful reverie (*How Green Was My Valley*).

Still, certain types of movies encouraged narrative strategies that other types didn't. The next three chapters consider several tendencies: first genres associated with realism and fantasy, then the genre of the thriller, and finally a pervasive trend toward self-conscious stylization and artifice. Because these types of films welcomed a free play with emerging schemas, they yield

some of the most extreme examples of the diversity of the forties ecosystem.

REALISM, FANTASY, AND OTHER FORMS OF ARTIFICE

"Movie Realism at Peak in 1948," one critic declared, after noting that the previous year had already seen an uptick in films dealing with social issues like racism, anti-Semitism, and abuses of psychiatry.[2] At the same period, though, films were welcoming phantoms, angels, and other guests from the beyond. The year 1947 brought *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, *The Bishop's Wife*, and *It's a Wonderful Life*, while the following year included *One Touch of Venus*, about a statue that comes to life. The polarity is pretty stark.

The "semidocumentary" impulse had many sources, not least the audience's eager consumption of newsreels and government reports. In addition, Italian Neorealist films began to be imported in 1946, and they may have pushed some filmmakers toward realism of situation and locale.[3] A 1947 Hollywood novel features an aspiring director who warns that studio pictures look fake compared with the "honesty" of films like *Open City*.[4]

Honesty had been a watchword for critics who had hoped the Hollywood system could break away from stereotypes and relate to the real men and women in the audience. "The movies," Otis Ferguson wrote in 1940, "are today the nearest thing ever imagined to the unaffected and unconscious process of life, as expressed in art."[5] Ferguson praised those films that presented characters with the dust and wrinkles of reality—men doing physical work, couples necking like those in the back row of the theater. James Agee sought even more, a spontaneous poetry that could issue from a respect for the sheer actuality beyond the studio backlot. Up to a point, combat films, both documentary and fictional, provided some of that poetry, but so too did *Boomerang!* (1947), a film shot on location with many nonprofessional actors that Agee said yielded "the most immaculate set of naturalistic performances I have seen in one movie."[6]

What, then, about the contrary impulse toward flamboyant fantasy? These films resulted in something far removed from honest realism and unstudied performances. Parker Tyler, an-

other major critic of the period, celebrated fantasy as a rejection of naturalism, unobtrusive style, and narrative continuity. Hollywood films were sheer artifice from start to finish, he thought, and although they were often vulgar, their artifice could be agreeably infantile. A film was a charade, with figures we know very well—stars—playing at being detectives or shopgirls. They take us into their confidence, and every line or look acknowledges that the whole show is about pleasing us. Fantasy, for Tyler, was the basic mode of the movies, and when films played up their fantasy side, they gained a seductive charm.[7]

Tyler went too far, I think, but it seems evident that powerful conventions informed both the realist and the fantasist impulses. When they weren't exploiting schemas established in other films, these modes were creating their own. And those schemas, when they were innovative, served to expand the resources of the Hollywood tradition.

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

Starting as part of a cycle that emphasized factual plots and location filming, "semidocumentary" filmmaking became a broader, more diffuse trend as the decade wore on. Although largely subservient to classical norms of plotting and narration, it did add some new options to the storytelling menu.

Hollywood filmmakers of the silent era frequently shot on location. Dramas like *Greed* (1924) and *The Crowd* (1928) set their action in city landscapes. Buster Keaton's *Seven Chances* (1925) and *The Cameraman* (1928), Harold Lloyd's *Girl Shy* (1924) and *Speedy* (1928), and many other films unleashed frantic chases throughout downtown Los Angeles and environs. But the coming of sound locked most filmmaking inside studios. Transporting the bulky sound equipment was costly, sound recording on site tended to be difficult, and postdubbing was not yet sophisticated enough to cover location work.[8] Westerns relied on outdoor landscapes, often on a studio ranch, but most dramas and comedies stayed within sound stages and backlots. If a location was used, it was typically somewhere close to Los Angeles.[9] Establishing long shots, made by second-unit crews, might show actual locales, but

closer shots of actors tended to use sets or rear projection. Chases in silent-comedy style would alternate location long shots with inserts of characters driving or riding filmed against process screens.

Some projects, such as *One Exciting Night* (1940) and *The Remarkable Andrew* (1942), incorporated real settings more fully. Broader change came through wartime pressures. As a part of quota policy, in September 1942 the government required that the set materials cost no more than $5,000 per picture. As a result, many filmmakers began shooting on location.[10] *This Gun for Hire* (1942) exploited Los Angeles landmarks. *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) and *Happy Land* (1943) ventured four hundred miles north to Santa Rosa, California.[11]

Portable lighting units and faster film stock made shooting outside the studio easier. *The House on 92nd Street* (1945) pioneered portable sound equipment that allowed direct recording in offices and FBI laboratories, and the crew used a surveillance vehicle to shoot the cast in Manhattan streets.[12] More and more fictional stories were played out in genuine settings, both exteriors and interiors. Location shooting wasn't necessarily cheaper, but there were compensations. Films could replace generic storefronts and alleys with a familiar world of chain stores, branded billboards, and the ubiquitous Coca-Cola logo. There was also a new kind of spectacle. Few studio sets could yield the immense visual values of the Los Angeles gasworks, which became a popular setting for crime films (fig. 9.1). The low-budget thriller *Jigsaw* (1949), claiming a budget of only $400,000, boasted of shooting wholly on New York locations, both exteriors and interiors, and postdubbing the entire sound track.

The sight of actual locales became a selling point. Images of New York were on display in many films, and *On the Town* (1949) demonstrated that even musical numbers could be shot on a metropolitan location.[13] The opening credits of *The Man on the Eiffel Tower* (1950) billed Paris as one of the film's stars. Avoiding tourist spots, *Call Northside 777* (1948) took the viewer to Chicago police headquarters, Skid Row, a Polish neighborhood, and the slums of the South Side, as well as the state prison in Joliet.

Viewers' appetite for actuality had been sharpened by 1930s

9.1. *This Gun for Hire* (1942): The Los Angeles gasworks become a maze for a chase.

documentaries like *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1938). The March of Time short subjects, launched in 1935, offered a cinematic counterpart to the photojournalism of *Life* magazine. Although sometimes taken for a newsreel, the series relied from the start on faked footage, with staged scenes and actors doubling for politicians.[14] "Straight" newsreels might be somewhat Hollywoodized too. While some combat footage presented unadorned footage of battles and frontline life, scenes might be staged, and shooting was shaped by studio norms, with cinematographers using multiple cameras for coverage, platforms that allowed unusual angles, and impromptu booms and dollies.[15] Throughout these years, the boundary between factual film and fictional treatment was soft.

Among the most celebrated of the documentaries was *The Fighting Lady* (1944), a 20th Century–Fox short feature assembled from 16mm naval combat footage and narrated by Robert Taylor. Encouraged by *The Fighting Lady*, Darryl F. Zanuck launched a cycle of "journalistic features."[16] He announced in early 1945 that Louis de Rochemont would move from supervising the March of Time series to creating what quickly came to be called "semi-documentaries." Based on actual events, these features would be filmed on location and give roles to the original participants. Zanuck boasted that his "factual dramas" would "achieve a realism never before attained on the screen." Yet artifice and classical tradition were never far off. Each film would include "a strong story line and box-office names."[17] In studio memos, Zanuck insisted on vivid characterization and dramatic high points.[18]

This terrain had been tentatively explored in Warners' *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), which used a voice-over narrator, newsreel excerpts, and other techniques to assure audiences of its accuracy. *Mission to Moscow* (1943) began with a documentary prologue by Ambassador Joseph E. Davies and filled itself out with newsreel footage and voice-over extracts from Davies's memoirs. RKO based *Hitler's Children* (1943) and *Youth Runs Wild* (1944) on journalistic accounts and blended in both newsreels and location filming, along with voice-over commentary. Similar techniques were used in Fox's *Little Tokyo* (1942) and Paramount's *The Hitler Gang* (1944).[19] In the frame story of *They Came to Blow Up America* (Fox, 1943) an FBI supervisor summarizes a dossier on a recently exposed spy ring.

Most of these were B pictures with an exploitation angle. Zanuck's semidocumentary slate promised something more serious and prestigious. *The House on 92nd Street*, originally titled *Now It Can Be Told*, centers on German spies tracked by the FBI. Unlike *They Came to Blow Up America*, whose prologue cautions that the film was not drawn from official records, *The House on 92nd Street* declares itself drawn from declassified files; the credits unroll against an FBI report. The prologue continues by asserting that the film was shot on the actual locations of the action and that FBI personnel play roles in the film. The epilogue shows newsreel footage of the captured Germans.

De Rochemont followed with *13 Rue Madeleine* (1947) and *Boomerang!* (1947), both substantial successes. By 1948, when MGM hired de Rochemont away from Fox, other studios and independent companies were starting to join the trend. Some producers claimed these films were wooing older viewers back to theaters in a period of declining box office.[20] As moderate-budget projects, semidocumentaries could be sold as rapid responses to news stories. *Cañon City*, released in summer 1948 by Eagle-Lion, reenacted a Colorado prison break made the previous December.

Not all semidocumentaries centered on crime or espionage; de Rochemont's *The Whistle at Eaton Falls* (1951) was a drama of small-town labor struggles. Still, the new filming approach coincided neatly with the emergence of a literary genre, the police procedural. This genre broke with the hard-boiled school's cus-

tomary portrayal of cops as fools or thugs. Instead the procedural showed police officers struggling to do a dirty job in a professional manner. The outstanding early example was Lawrence Treat's novel *V as in Victim* (1945), which centered on a police detective and a lab expert cooperating to solve a murder. The genre's conventions were crystallized in the radio show *Dragnet*, premiering in 1949, and two novels, MacKinlay Kantor's *Signal Thirty-Two* (1950) and Hillary Waugh's *Last Seen Wearing . . .* (1952).[21]

By then, films had already developed procedural story lines.[22] The investigators might be cops (*The Street with No Name*, 1948; *He Walked by Night*, 1948), or agents of government bureaus (*T-Men*, 1947; *Walk a Crooked Mile*, 1948; *Border Incident*, 1949), or even crusading reporters (*Call Northside 777*, 1948). The films emphasized hardworking men's alliances and struggles against bureaucracy, the tedious legwork of investigation, the reliance on forensic science, and the cross section of the public that any police inquiry will encounter. These conventions fitted smoothly into the new realism identified with semidocumentary.

For these reasons it's too strong to call this trend, as one trade paper did, "one of the most revolutionary changes in basic story values since the advent of sound."[23] Yet the semidocumentary procedural film displays at least three major storytelling innovations. For one, the external voice-over not only reinforces the sense of realism but becomes part of the fabric of narration. The know-it-all narrator provides a guiding exposition, summarizing a montage sequence, offering wry comments, expressing the thoughts of phlegmatic investigators or their prey. The voice-over is often accompanied by supplementary footage, either historical clips wedged into the flow of the story or reels run in headquarters, where men study surveillance material. It's as if the mini-film, usually technically rougher, brings an aura of realism to the surrounding fiction.

A second innovation consisted in filling the plot with nearly irrelevant secondary characters. Hollywood films have long liked character bits that accessorize the main narrative line, but this tendency pervades the procedural. Montages of dreary questioning, the distinctive voices and faces of inconsequential witnesses, and the false trails and red herrings the investigators encounter

can create a more diffuse, episodic plot. This cross-sectional quality comes to the fore in the almost city-symphony opening of *Naked City*, but it's there even in a minor entry like *Between Midnight and Dawn* (1950). The first dozen minutes of the film get filled with the incidental characters the partnering patrolmen meet in a single night.

Perhaps most surprising, the procedural largely eliminates that Hollywood staple, a romantic storyline. The hard-boiled private eye commonly faces temptation in the form of a seductress or falls in love with the innocent woman who needs protecting. But the patrolmen, plainclothesmen, and squad detectives of the early procedurals either have fairly happy marriages or lead lives free of romantic complications. The absence of women, along with the presentation of male comradeship under pressure, makes the procedural a postwar heir of the combat movie. Later the procedural becomes more soap-operatic as cops' romantic problems come to the fore, as in Ed McBain's 87th Precinct books and films like *Heat* (1986).

Critics were quick to notice that the conventions of the traditional crime film hijacked the semidocumentary impulse. *Variety* remarked that many of the films were "nothing more than cops and robbers."[24] As the procedural developed, it lost some of its purity—adding romance subplots and drifting from actual cases. Semidocumentary sequences were sometimes embedded in a standard thriller (*Follow Me Quietly*, 1949).

Still, some films added new wrinkles. Shooting on location revived the urban chase sequence of the silent era. Pursuits around the Williamsburg Bridge in *The Naked City*, the Los Angeles storm drains in *He Walked by Night*, the New Orleans waterfront in *Panic in the Streets* (1950), and other dangerous cityscapes sharpen tension more effectively than generic sound stage decor and rear projection. *Mr. 880* (1950) makes the procedural comically heartwarming. And although the voice-over narration typically presented itself as dryly detached, it might vary its tone somewhat. Mark Hellinger's Runyonesque voice-over in *The Naked City*, relying on his celebrity as a Manhattan columnist, breaks with objectivity and articulates the thoughts of several characters, teases the culprit with sarcastic inner monologues,

and devolves into barroom musings ("Do the machines in a factory ever need rest?").

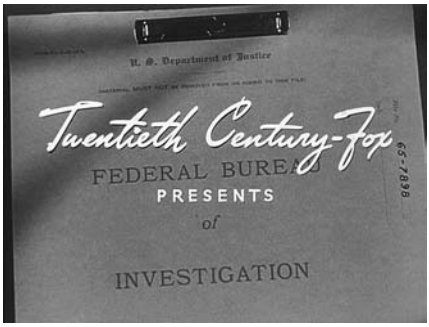
Perhaps the most ambitious semidocumentary procedural is *Boomerang!* After a minister is murdered, we see two successive efforts to solve the case. The first shows the police scouring the town and eventually snagging a drifter named Waldron. Witnesses pick him out of a lineup, and we learn that his pistol could have fired the fatal bullet. At the midpoint, the inquest establishes what District Attorney Henry Harvey calls "a perfect case."

In the two previous de Rochemont semidocumentaries, the plot attributes near omniscience to the authorities. The FBI official in *The House on 92nd Street* has located the Nazi cell, and from the start the army intelligence officers in *13 Rue Madeleine* have known who's the traitor in their midst. But in *Boomerang!* Harvey seems baffled by the murder case, and we're never let in on his thinking.

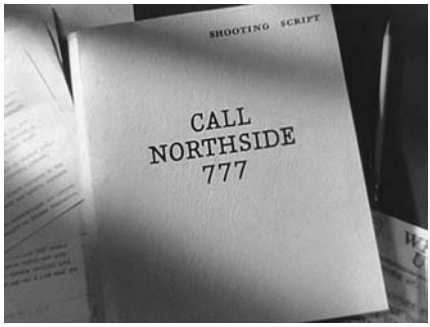
During the second half of the film, we, like the citizenry, have been led to assume that the case against Waldron is open and shut. So it comes as a surprise when, in the climactic hearing, Harvey declares that he believes Waldron is innocent. He reveals that he has conducted his own investigation. Flashbacks show Harvey's men testing the eyewitness accounts, and he introduces proof that Waldron's pistol could not have fired the fatal bullet. Harvey doesn't solve the murder, but he does exonerate an innocent man.

Boomerang! becomes a procedural that hides the procedure. Instead, it adds a dash of social criticism. While keeping Harvey's investigation offscreen, the moving-spotlight narration shuttles between the police squad and some local politicians who are hoping to exploit the case to win the election. Against this calculating corruption, Harvey's later courtroom flashbacks illustrate meticulous law enforcement. His investigation, conducted through logic and the presumption of innocence, tacitly criticizes the brute-force inquiry that hammered Waldron into confessing.

Boomerang! brings to the fore a contradiction we find in many semidocumentaries. An opening title declares that the story is true and the film was shot in the very places it happened. Yet the voice-over commentary immediately tells us the city we'll see is



9.2. *The House on 92nd Street* (1945) promises authenticity: the credits open with an FBI report submitted to the Department of Justice.



9.3. By 1948 and *Call Northside 777*, the authenticating document is not a report but the film's shooting script.

not the actual locale of the case. Symmetrically, at the end, the voice-over declares: "The case was never solved." Yet from the start of the film we have seen a suspect who has a strong motive to kill the minister. He is shown briefly in the courtroom audience, and we see him leave when Waldron is released. Later we learn that he died on the highway trying to outrun the police. The fact of an unresolved case is overridden by the conventions of the crime movie. Perhaps we should take the film's title as a reference to the two investigations—one trajectory out, one backtracking—or to the give-and-take between real life and the demands of movie convention.[25]

Like *Boomerang!*, most of the films in the cycle tame their realism through arresting artifice. Locations tempted cinematographers toward offbeat compositions and intricate play with depth. Both the chiaroscuro of *T-Men* and the wire-sharp summer imagery of *The Naked City* display immense virtuosity. At the beginning of the cycle, the films maintained a pretense of fidelity to facts, but very quickly the artifice was admitted (figs. 9.2 and 9.3). In *Cañon City*, the voice-over narrator gains a body, though he keeps it offscreen, and he accepts a tour of the prison hosted by the warden; during their tour, actors play inmates and work against rear-projected settings. The prologue to *The Sleeping City* (1950) presents star Richard Conte in his doctor's scrubs explaining to us that the mystery thriller was shot in Bellevue Hospital

but the story "is completely fictional and did not actually happen in Bellevue or in New York City."[26]

NOBODY BUT ENEMIES

While the procedural film ran in tandem with crime fiction, "message pictures" were indebted to other cultural forms. Bigotry, alcoholism, prison conditions, mental illness, mob justice, juvenile delinquency, and other social problems had occasionally been treated in 1930s films, both mainstream and exploitation. Social issues reappeared with more force in a cycle of A-level features in the mid-to-late 1940s. The trend was fostered initially by a batch of controversial novels on themes of prejudice.[27] The cycle grew stronger after 1948, a fact *Variety* traced to Truman's reelection and more progressive public attitudes.[28] Stars also sought realistic and attention-grabbing roles. By winning critical praise and Oscar attention, the cycle gained prestige and extended well into the 1950s.

A fact-based attitude toward social problems had already been part of Depression-era photojournalism, agitprop stage dramas, and proletarian fiction. Meyer Levin's novel *Citizens* (1940) offered a Dos Passos–like treatment of a 1937 Chicago massacre of striking workers. The former social worker Caroline Slade produced a series of novels based on case studies of prostitutes and single mothers. The best-known literary exposé was John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), which Steinbeck researched by joining dispossessed farmers in their trek from the Dust Bowl to California.[29]

Socially conscious 1930s novels and plays flirted with montage, stream of consciousness, "the collective novel," and other quasi-modernist techniques.[30] James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), a searing eyewitness account of poverty among tenant farmers, was a collage of descriptions, meditations, and bitter lyricism. Steinbeck's book alternated chapters recounting the Joad family's journey with chapters of a more "epic" sort, ranging from descriptions of nature to free-form vignettes of social life, like deal making on a used-car lot.

When Hollywood took up social problem storytelling, however, filmmakers not only avoided the 1930s concern with the class struggle, they treated social issues through forms already established by studio traditions. Fox gave *The Grapes of Wrath* (1941) a linear plot structure, though retaining Tom Joad's eventual embrace of the labor struggle as an echo of the "conversion" strategy of proletarian fiction.

By the 1940s, media culture's dramatization of topical issues was less tied to labor struggles. Popular novels exposed political corruption (*A Lion Is in the Streets*, 1945), mental illness (*The Snake Pit*, 1948), and anti-Semitism (*Gentleman's Agreement*, 1947). Race relations came to the fore, partly in response to 1943 riots in Harlem, Detroit, and Los Angeles. Gunnar Myrdal's research study *An American Dilemma* (1944) presented a scathing analysis of discrimination against black citizens. The theme was taken up in plays like *Deep Are the Roots* (1946) and *Home of the Brave* (1946) and best sellers like Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* (1944), Richard Wright's *Black Boy* (1945), Frank Yerby's *The Vixens* (1947), and Sinclair Lewis's *Kingsblood Royal* (1947).[31]

Like most of these authors, filmmakers turned away from collective heroes and large-scale conflicts. The usual message picture presents a goal-oriented character facing clear-cut obstacles. *The Snake Pit* centers on a woman trying to regain sanity in the hostile conditions of a mental institution. *Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman* (1946) shows the alcoholic heroine's struggle to play the role of wife and mother, while *Crossfire* and *Intruder in the Dust* (1949) treat prejudice in the context of a murder investigation. A dual-protagonist format is used in *The Search* (1948), in which a mother and son try to find one another in a devastated postwar Germany. Multiple-protagonist plots were also turned to social commentary, as in the returning-veteran films *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) and *Till the End of Time* (1946).

Hollywood's typical double plotline, intertwining romance with the quest for a goal, could be recast in the light of a social problem. One strand of *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) is devoted to a reporter's investigation of anti-Semitism, a second to his courtship of a wealthy young woman; the story lines merge when their romance is troubled by her latent prejudice. Rehabilitation

films such as *Pride of the Marines* (1946), *The Men* (1950), and *Never Fear* (1950) tie overcoming a handicap to the protagonist's acceptance of love. In *Pinky* (1949) a black woman "passing for white" must choose between her white lover and fidelity to her heritage.

The problem picture likewise draws on conventional narrational tactics. A striking example is *The Lost Weekend* (1945). The opening, in which alcoholic would-be writer Don Birnam looks for places to hide his bottle of rye, sets our range of knowledge. Nearly all of what follows is restricted to him as he avoids the weekend his brother Wick and his girlfriend Helen have planned for him.

Dodging them, Don goes on a bender. During his visit to his local bar, Don narrates a pair of flashbacks explaining how he got to this state. In the first flashback we get vivid optical POV shots during a performance of *La Traviata*, when Don's eyes follow the wineglasses, trays, and toasts onstage. That passage modulates into pure wish fulfillment as Don imagines the bottle of rye he keeps in the coat he checked.

At the midpoint Don vows to start his novel, but he begins to sink lower and lower in his search for money to buy booze. Optical POV shots reveal a bottle's hiding place in a lamp, and they fill a montage sequence as he trudges the streets looking for a pawnshop. The heightened subjectivity makes us complicit with Don's lies to Helen and Wick while continuing to surprise us with his ever more degrading stratagems for finding money and drink.

The extreme of subjectivity is reached when Don, back in his apartment, sees a bat attack a mouse crawling through his wall. The sequence presents a hallucination, but it leaves behind the stylization of the opera scene. The mouse and bat are palpable, seen in the same shots with Don himself. When the skittering bat brushes Don's forehead, the hallucination is nearly as tangible for us as for him.

The Lost Weekend's progression from external observation to delusional subjectivity is counterbalanced by the presence of Helen. Whereas the source novel keeps us locked in Don's consciousness and leaves him unredeemed at the end, the film's narration widens its perspective a little to offer him some hope. The

climax shifts the spotlight to Helen, who catches up with Don on Monday morning. Through crosscutting between the two, we learn of both his suicide plan and—again through optical POV shots—her discovery of his pistol. Helen persuades him to try sobriety one more time.

Wearily Don begins to recount his planned novel to Helen. It turns out to be the film we've seen, and as his voice-over rolls on, we witness the film's first sequence again: Don packs for his weekend trip, the bottle dangling outside his window. In a panning shot that reverses the opening camera movement, the film closes on the cityscape that began the plot.

Optical POV, imaginings, voice-over, memory flashbacks, hallucination, restricted narration giving way to moving-spotlight alternation, one sequence replaying an earlier one, symmetrical opening and closing shots, even theremin music recalling *Spellbound*: *The Lost Weekend* blends all these characteristic 1940s devices to plunge us into the alcoholic's world and to lift us out at the end. The techniques are cunningly ordered, moving from external realism to profound delirium, and finally to a broader perspective that allows us to hope that Helen's final struggle to save Don will succeed.

Because the message pictures seem only mildly critical, they haven't enjoyed cinephiles' favor to the extent that semidocumentary films have. They do indeed have a formulaic quality.[32] But these films weren't simply recycling the premises of the problem pictures of the 1930s. These later entries benefited from the fresh look of the semidocumentary trend by announcing their basis in fact and including a good deal of location shooting. Outstanding films of the cycle also displayed the era's greater subtlety of characterization; Lucas Beauchamp, the steely, unbending African American farmer of *Intruder in the Dust* (1950), is only one example. In addition, the message movie opened up some innovations, or at least reinforced minor options already available.

For one thing, there was an adjustment in the protagonist's role. Film historian Pearl Latteier has suggested that most social problem films pivot around two major characters, the victim and the crusader.[33] Often, as in *Crossfire*, the crusader serves as pro-

tagonist and relegates the victim(s) to a minor role. Sometimes both victim and crusader serve as protagonists—either fused in one, as in the investigator posing as a Jew in *Gentleman's Agreement*, or as dual protagonists. The drama advances through the actions of both the psychiatrist and the tormented black soldier in *Home of the Brave* (1949), and both the attorney and the juvenile delinquent in *Knock on Any Door* (1949).

The crusader protagonist may be righteous from the start or may become converted. *The Lawless* (1950) at first concentrates on young migrant laborers' run-ins with local youths, but after one is jailed, the plot's momentum is picked up by a newsman who drops his cynicism and takes up the boy's cause. The endangered black defendant in *Intruder in the Dust* has three champions, each holding a different view: the lawyer thinks he's guilty, the elderly widow thinks he's innocent, and the teenage boy is unsure.

When the victim serves as protagonist, the character is likely to be more reactive than active. The black doctor passing for white in *Lost Boundaries* (1949), another de Rochemont semi-documentary, is prey to forces outside him. He must either betray his people by lying about his race or risk losing his practice and a military commission. The heroine of *The Lady Gambles* (1949) is powerless before her gambling addiction; her breakthrough is prepared by her husband and triggered by a hard-bitten doctor practicing tough love. In *The Snake Pit*, despite the help of a sympathetic psychiatrist, the protagonist is largely alone in confronting her plight.

Caged (1950), an amalgam of *The Snake Pit* and *Brute Force* (1947), puts the naive Marie Allen at the mercy of other prison inmates and a sadistic matron. She must give her baby up for adoption, and after toeing the line for a year is refused parole. The crusader role is filled by the sympathetic warden Mrs. Benton, and accordingly the spotlight shifts to her as she pleads for Marie and tries to focus the institution on rehabilitation. Yet Mrs. Benton is powerless as well, faced with smug bureaucrats blocking her reforms. After Marie tries to escape and is brutalized by the matron, she turns tough and cynical. She accepts parole terms backed by corrupt administrators in exchange for joining a criminal gang on the outside. *Caged* is one of the few social problem films showing

the crusader losing the fight, and its victimized protagonist can survive only by joining the forces of darkness.

The message movies offer other revisions of classical dramaturgy. Sometimes there's a clear-cut antagonist, such as a vengeful racist (*Crossfire*; *No Way Out*, 1950). But often the forces opposing the victim are more diffuse. No single anti-Semite engineers the incidents of prejudice that Philip Green confronts in *Gentleman's Agreement*; no one racist schemes to inflame the mob in *The Lawless*. The point of a social comment film is that the problem is pervasive, so the protagonist, whether victim or crusader or both, will encounter many opponents. "Nobody in the whole wide world," says Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*, "but enemies."

But she is too severe. The Joads' journey leads them to meet friendly and unfriendly cops, hospitable growers and exploitative ones, generous storekeepers as well as hostile gas pump jockeys. The antagonists will invariably loom large, because their aggression promises conflict, but they often take their place in a broader spectrum of attitudes toward the problem in question. Before Marie turns hard in *Caged*, the film displays the range of inmates' reactions to their harsh treatment, much as the secondary story lines in *The Snake Pit* reveal patients' different adjustments to hospital conditions. In such cross-sectional plots, the lead character's basic conflict with those in authority is filled out with secondary conflicts as well as scenes of kindness and shared suffering.

As a result of the dispersed pressures on the victim, demands of tight plotting may be relaxed in favor of a more episodic structure of encounters. The young fruit pickers of *The Lawless* meet their fates largely through a string of unlucky accidents that unleash prejudice. Don Birnam's search for drinking money drives him into a series of unplanned situations, most of which turn out badly.

The looser pattern of incidents may culminate in an unusually uncertain ending. The heroine's cure in *The Snake Pit* is provisional; the film promises no perfect future. Don Birnam might dry out, but he might not. Ma Joad vows that she and her family will go on, but all they can hope for is an endless migration. Will their lot ever improve? And what will happen to Tom in the clan-

destine labor movement? Mother and child are reunited in *The Search*, but hundreds of other abandoned children are unlikely to find their families. When an offstage ending can be predicted, it's likely to be pessimistic. "She'll be back," sighs Mrs. Benton, the warden in *Caged*, as she watches Marie go off with the gangsters. About all you can count on is that the problem will not end with this single story.

Such open endings aren't unique to 1940s problem pictures. *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932) is famously inconclusive about penal reform and its protagonist's future. But the postwar social comment film went bigger and deeper than its predecessors. The relaxation of the Production Code, an urge to gain prestige and awards, a commitment to making each A release a must-see attraction, and the need to offer fare that wouldn't appear on television: these and other late 1940s developments prompted investment in controversial subjects. Again, storytelling possibilities broached in the earlier era were crystallized, expanded, and enhanced.

THE REPLAY'S THE THING

Films of supernatural fantasy didn't achieve the critical acclaim or box office success accorded to the semidocumentary and the problem picture. There were comparatively few such films, most were made at lower budget levels, and the very category of fantasy was rather vague. Today, when superhero sagas and sword-and-sorcery adventure are central to American cinema, it's surprising to realize those options weren't salient in forties films.

Varieties of fantasy were more prominent in other media. Fantasy literature then included what we'd call horror, science fiction, and fairy tales.[34] Tales of time travel and alternative worlds were filling pulp magazines and radio plays. Science fiction novels were slowly gaining in popularity.[35] More upscale fantasy enjoyed prestige on Broadway in Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942) and Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel* (1945) and *Brigadoon* (1947). In 1944, a critic noted, the New York stage was taken over by apparitions, including a giant rabbit (*Harvey*), a Christlike marine saving a besieged post (*The Streets*

Are Guarded), and a dead businessman revisiting his family to protect them from a swindler (*But Not Goodbye*). The 1945–46 season brought no fewer than three plays about soldiers returning as ghosts.[36]

Broadway's interest in fantasy did lead to some A-level film adaptations like *One Touch of Venus*, in which a statue comes to life, and *Harvey* (1950), with its suggestion that the tipsy protagonist's giant rabbit might be real. But on the whole, fantasy was believed to be bad box office. After *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), other Disney features proved less lucrative, confirming *Variety*'s judgment that "Fantasies and fairy stories are way out of the groove of run-of-the-mill film entertainment."[37] With children paying a reduced ticket price, a film aimed at that audience was not a good investment. *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) was a notorious flop, failing to recoup its vast $2.77 million cost.[38] Fox's Shirley Temple vehicle *The Blue Bird* (1940) failed no less spectacularly.[39] Adult-oriented fantasy was also considered a tough sell.[40] In all, the seventy top-grossing films released between 1939 and 1949 included only one fantasy, *Snow White* (reissued in 1944).[41]

Until the early 1950s, A-level producers stayed away from science fiction, which was associated with pulp magazines and children's serials.[42] Horror films were common enough, but they lay almost completely in the B range. By default the typical fantasy film was a tale of supernatural doings in a fairly realistic, usually contemporary context. Examples we've already considered are *Flesh and Fantasy* (1943) and *Destiny* (1944). The dominant strain was comedy, often low-budget. Possibilities included invisible corpses (*The Body Disappears*, 1941), goddesses (*Down to Earth*, 1947), mythical creatures (*Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid*, 1948), leprechauns (*The Luck of the Irish*, 1948; *Shamrock Hill*, 1949), talking mules (*Francis*, 1949), magical squirrels (*The Great Rupert*, 1950), and caterpillars that danced to the tune of "Yes, Sir, That's My Baby" (*Once Upon a Time*, 1944). Dreams could motivate otherworldly comedy, such as the angel's mission in *The Horn Blows at Midnight* (1945).

In the same vein were adaptations of Thorne Smith's naughty fantasy fiction in the *Topper* series and *I Married a Witch* (1942). *Turnabout* (1940), an adaptation of Smith's 1931 body-swapping

novel, centers on a husband and wife, each complaining about how easy the other has it.[43] They get to find out when an Indian idol in their apartment transfers mind, personality, and voice from one to the other. As a result the husband-as-wife has to fight off a Lothario and the wife-as-husband minces into the office and explains how to keep up with the latest fashions. As you'd expect, pregnancy is involved too. The farcical elements are enhanced in the film version, where seamless vocal substitutions were made possible by recent advances in rerecording.

The time-travel premise, very popular in the pulps and comic books and always a fruitful source for narrative experiment, went almost completely unexplored in films. H. G. Wells's time machine was redesigned for Broadway in Maxwell Anderson's 1937 play *The Star-Wagon*, which allowed its protagonist to revisit his past and consider how his life might have changed. David O. Selznick paid a high price for the movie rights, but *The Star-Wagon* never came to the screen.[44] Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* was turned into a 1949 Bing Crosby musical, but the film was one of Crosby's lowest-performing vehicles. As you'd expect, when a time-travel plot was used, it yielded comic anachronisms. The patriotic musical *Where Do We Go from Here?* (1945) gives Valley Forge a USO, and when the action returns to the twentieth century we hear the Fox studio fanfare.

One of the few time-travel dramas of the forties, *Repeat Performance* (1947), relies on the theme of implacable fate. Broadway star Sheila Page shoots her philandering husband just before midnight on New Year's Eve. Guilt-stricken, she wonders how she could have avoided it. Abruptly she's transported back exactly one year and given a chance to alter her future. But even knowing what occurred in the parallel world, she can't change the basic situation. In the alternative 1946, Sheila fails to keep her husband sober and faithful, and at the climax he is once more shot, though in different circumstances. As in other forking-path tales, like *Run Lola Run* (1998) and O. Henry's story "Roads of Destiny," fate isn't easily avoided.

Repeat Performance's return to an earlier time is partly motivated by the theatrical milieu. At the moment Sheila yearns to start over, she imagines "rewriting the third act," and an exter-

nal voice-over narrator hints that she can make time "run backwards." At the midpoint of the plot, Sheila suggests during a rehearsal that the director reshuffle the play's scenes to make the act "backwards." The title *Repeat Performance* encapsulates the parallel between a life relived and a revised play text that retains the main pieces of action. Interestingly, though, we never know what caused Sheila to kill her husband in the opening. We get a revision that effaces the original, a replay without the play.

Instead of restaging the past, *It Happened Tomorrow* (1944) poses the knotty complications that stem from knowing the future. The donnée had been explored before, but the film develops it cleverly, adding a switcheroo epilogue. On three nights reporter Larry Stevens receives a copy of the next day's evening newspaper. This miracle helps him get the jump on his rivals by being on the scene when news breaks. Instead of benefiting him, though, his foreknowledge gets him into trouble with the police: he must be in league with the gang that's pulling the robberies. The prophecy motif is expanded when Larry falls in love with a fake medium, Sylvia, who inadvertently predicts the next day's headline. The plot reaches a crisis on the third night, when Larry reads in tomorrow's paper that he has been murdered. The film cunningly contrives to both save Larry and keep the newspaper's story accurate.

The finale has a neat sting. *It Happened Tomorrow* begins with a frame in which Larry and Sylvia celebrated their fiftieth anniversary, so we know he won't be killed in the flashback. At the close of that embedded story, with the young couple married and soaking in the rain, they optimistically predict celebrating the very anniversary we've seen. When the epilogue returns to the opening celebration, we expect the film to end. Instead the narration flashes back to the young Larry and Sylvia running off using tomorrow's newspaper as an umbrella. They no longer need magic to foresee their future.

ENDLESS LOVE

A time-travel plot epitomizes the way fantasy narratives ask us to accept highly unrealistic premises. Accordingly, the story ac-

tion rests on special rules, and these can encourage filmmakers to vary classical storytelling tactics. Unusual story-world rules had particular impact in the supernatural romance, one of the subgenres that would treat fantasy for drama rather than humor.

Two earlier films supplied prototypes: *Outward Bound* (1930) and *Peter Ibbetson* (1935).[45] Each plot presumes an undying bond between lovers, set in contrast to a mundane, unfeeling reality. The threat is always separation, which must be overcome by devotion surpassing space and time. In *Ibbetson*, the distant lovers can meet in their shared dreams. In *Outward Bound*, the familiar trope of passion enduring beyond death is given an earthly happy ending. A man and his lover have committed suicide in his flat. They awake on board a ship bound for the hereafter and witness the other passengers gradually coming to realize their fate. But otherworldly authority decrees that the couple must separate. A quirk in the suicide plan lets the man return to reality, and he has only a few moments to bring his lover back with him.

Outward Bound was remade as *Between Two Worlds* (1944), with the couple now married and the ending altered. Instead of the freed man returning to the ship to rescue his lover, the wife's desire to stay with her husband triggers a return to their flat, where they awaken, reunited and spared from death. In the spirit of 1940s Dream Time, their voyage has been something of a shared vision.

Pandora and the Flying Dutchman (1951) adds a mythic cast to the reunion of a dead lover with a living one. A seventeenth-century sea captain, believing his wife is unfaithful, stabs her to death. As punishment he must sail until he finds a woman who will die for love of him. He turns up in 1930 on the Spanish coast, where he finds his wife reincarnated as a willful and flirtatious American. The Dutchman's mysterious attraction softens her, and after spurning two other suitors, she makes the sacrifice.

This tale, blended with the myth of Pandora as the quintessential woman, is presented through a host of 1940s strategies. The plot begins with the discovery of the two lovers, drowned. The mystery of their fate is intensified through the soliloquy/commentary of an old researcher observing the reenactment of the legend. He fully understands the situation only when the

modern-day version of the Dutchman supplies his perspective in a recounted flashback. In the epilogue, the two men's voice-overs alternate in a kind of antiphony in praise of the recovery of lost love and lost time.

The *Ibbetson* convention of lovers meeting in an otherworldly realm was staged in a physical space in *The Enchanted Cottage* (1945). This adaptation of a 1923 play is reshaped to fit 1940s narrative conventions. There's a frame story narrated by a blind pianist, a flashback to the central romance, and spoken commentary, including a passage of his-and-hers voice-overs during an embedded flashback. There's also a therapeutic process by which the blind man helps a veteran with a deformed face accept the love of the homely housemaid who tends to him in the cottage. The special rule in force is that once a loving couple inhabits the cottage, they see each other's inner beauty. When the aviator and the housemaid look at each other with affection, they lose their physical faults. They come to believe that the cottage has magically changed their appearance.

On the stage, the husband and wife remain their unsightly selves throughout. But in the film the new schemas of interior narration allow for a shared subjectivity, locking us within the couple's vision of themselves as young and beautiful. As a result, classical continuity rules are stretched to accommodate shifting levels of reality. During the visit from the veteran's shallow mother and stepfather, the protagonists' faces change from shot to shot, shuttling between their self-perception and their true appearance (figs. 9.4 to 9.6). As we'll see with *The Curse of the Cat People*, an unrealistic situation invites remaking Hollywood norms.

Having produced the era's most overblown costume picture (*Gone with the Wind*), most overblown home front film (*Since You Went Away*), and most overblown Western (*Duel in the Sun*), David O. Selznick mounted the most overblown supernatural romance. While filming *Portrait of Jennie* (1949) he lamented that this modest little film had become a colossus, culminating in a climax with the screen widening, the sound filling multiple channels, and the image bursting into color.

Before that finale, the film exploits characteristic 1940s nar-

9.4. *The Enchanted Cottage* (1945): In the master shot, the disfigured Oliver and the homely Laura are seen objectively, as his mother and stepfather see them.

9.5. But cutting in to them reveals them as they seem to each other, with Oliver handsome . . .

9.6. . . . and Laura radiant. Instead of providing optical POV shots, director John Cromwell "subjectivizes" shot/reverse-shot framings. It's as if the space shared by the couple is a magical zone that outsiders can't penetrate.

rative tactics: a prologue with not one but two voice-over narrators (one external, one a character), location shooting in Central Park and other New York spots, two philosophical-poetic opening quotations, theremin music, and a closing voice-over from a dead woman. This tale of time's ribbon candy pattern doesn't resort to standard flashbacks, either recalled or recounted. Instead, the past thrusts itself into the present in the person of Jennie. During the winter and spring of a single year, the luckless painter Eben Adams encounters her as a little girl, a teenager, a college student, and a mature woman. He falls in love with her.

Is Jennie a time traveler or a ghost or an illusion, or even a muse? A bit of each. After each brief visit she withdraws, leaving Eben yearning for her. The art dealer Miss Spinney suggests that in order to paint well Eben must love someone, so perhaps he has

conjured up Jennie to inspire his art. At the least, she obsesses him as he sketches, draws, and paints her at different ages. (The fullest version, the portrait, won't be shown to us until the film's last image, in blazing Technicolor.) Yet even though Spinney can't see Jennie when Eben can, the girl isn't an utter hallucination. Playing detective, Eben learns that Jennie was once flesh and blood. Years ago her sailboat was swamped by a tidal wave. The man has somehow met a woman from a spiritual world who has been seeking him; it's just that, like Eurydice, she is pulled back into it.

Selznick was initially concerned to make Jennie neither a living, time-traveling person nor a pure product of Eben's imagination.[46] Things got more complex as the production became more chaotic, with a flurry of script changes throughout filming.[47] As a result, *Portrait of Jennie* has enough free-floating special rules to stock a couple of other films. It posits a parallel, accelerated temporal dimension in which Jennie grows up while Eben ages only a few months. Jennie somehow has a definite foreknowledge that he will paint her portrait, but she's unable to remember things she told him in previous visits. And what leads him to think a man can reunite with his beloved on the anniversary of her death?

For all its ersatz romanticism, *Portrait of Jennie* gestures toward a more lyrical, less linear narrative model than is usual in classical storytelling. The plot, as curiously dawdling as its protagonist, fills the intervals between Jennie's visits with secondary characters: Miss Spinney, Gus the Irish cabdriver, and an assortment of old coots Eben meets while tracking down Jennie.

In most films, motifs decorate an ongoing line of action, but here they are isolated and given greater weight, each one gaining a supernatural tint. There's the little girl's ominous song about not knowing her past or future, a tune that haunts Eben throughout the winter. There are Eben's paintings of rocky coastal landscapes, created before he met Jennie yet uncannily recording the place where she died. And there's the scarf Jennie leaves behind on their first encounter. Eben preserves it until the night she appears and sits for her portrait, only to have her vanish when she picks it up. The scarf will survive his final effort to bring Jennie back from death and serve as a memento of her half-worldly existence.

SPECIAL RULES FOR THE AFTERLIFE

The biggest fantasy cycle of the 1940s features ghosts, angels, and versions of Satan. How to show these afterlifers' activities on film? Folklore and the fine arts had built up some sturdy conventions. Crystallized in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843), they were transposed to cinema in the silent era and elaborated in *Topper* (1937), *A Christmas Carol* (1938), and *The Ghost Goes West* (1938). Ghosts might be transparent, presented in superimpositions, or fairly solid. They might be visible to all the characters, to only some of the characters, or to us alone. Typically they enter a scene by materializing and leave by melting into the air.

The changes that could be rung on ghostly schemas illustrate once more the variorum quality of popular culture. Afterlifers could comment on the action from the sidelines, as when the dead pilot in *A Guy Named Joe* (1944) slips in wisecracks while his grieving girlfriend is wooed by a young aviator. In the budget-strapped B picture *The Man in the Trunk* (1942), an all too tangible ghost explains why he uses the door: "I failed my examination on how to walk through walls." Most ghosts can pick up objects, but the ones in *The Cockeyed Miracle* can't—which generates suspense when they must hide a signed check. *Happy Land* (1943) reviews the life of a dead sailor as recalled by his father and ghostly great-grandfather; the story is presented with voice-over commentary, as if the two men were watching our movie.

Every film either accedes to the default or creates special rules, which are usually signaled explicitly. Some ghosts, for instance, can induce dreams and amnesia, as when Captain Gregg in *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947) orders the sleeping Mrs. Muir to forget the year they have shared. Of course the Captain's trick is imperfect, because Mrs. Muir's love for him survives in fragmentary memories and what she thinks are dream images. In *The Bishop's Wife* (1947), Henry the bishop is praying for guidance when the angel Dudley drops in on him (fig. 9.7). At the climax, Dudley's magical powers (he can trim a Christmas tree with a conductor's wave) enable him to reshape story time. After he's helped Henry get the donation he sought, Dudley announces he can blot out Henry's and Julia's memory of him. The film's narration obliges,

9.7. *The Bishop's Wife* (1947): Henry prays for guidance early in the film.

9.8. At the end, having helped Henry fund the new church, the angel Dudley leaves.

9.9. Dissolve to Henry, in prayer and without memory of Dudley's intervention. The plot has been miraculously reset, with the main difference being the permanent aura around the cathedral in the painting.

letting Dudley leave the study in out of focus close-up and placing Henry again in front of his cathedral painting (figs. 9.8 and 9.9). The earlier scene is rerun, but with husband and wife united. The typical 1940s replay gets celestial motivation.

Special rules can emerge more subtly. *The Curse of the Cat People* (1944) uses equivocal narration to create perhaps the most mysterious afterlifer of the period. Irena has died in *The Cat People* (1943). Her widowed husband Oliver has married Alice, and their child Amy, dreamy and unpopular, wishes for a friend. At first, it seems that she conjures up one: Irena.

Irena appears first as pure light, then as a silhouette and a murmured lullaby at Amy's bedside, and then as something solid entering the frame as Amy plays in the garden. In one garden scene Amy seems to see Irena, while Oliver cannot. In cinema we assume objective (fictional) reality to be the default value, so the incompatible views given to Amy and Oliver might suggest that Irena exists only in Amy's mind. This impression is enhanced

9.10. *The Curse of the Cat People* (1944): Oliver and Amy leave the garden, with Irena visible in the foreground.

9.11. Independent of Amy's viewpoint, we're shown Irena watching apprehensively.

by the sparkling princess dress Irena wears; she resembles the benevolent witch of *The Wizard of Oz* and the kindly fairy of *Pinocchio*.

Yet other evidence suggests that Irena isn't merely Amy's vision but is a real ghost. Alice and Oliver sense that Irena is haunting their home. More tangibly, two shots at the end of the crucial garden scene endow her with free-standing existence (figs. 9.10 and 9.11).[48] At this point the narration signals that she's visible only to Amy and us (as Jennie in *Portrait of Jennie* is visible only to Eben and us).[49]

The final scene confirms Irena's supernatural mission. As Oliver takes Amy into the house, he asks if she can see Irena. Amy looks and sees her, smiling. Can Oliver see her? Now that he's decided to trust Amy, he says yes—without even looking. As in the earlier garden scene, once father and daughter have gone inside, we're treated to an independent shot of Irena under the tree. She melts away, in the conventional disappearing act of an afterlifer. Saving this conventional handling for this moment alone invests it with the air of permanent departure.

As a fantasy *The Curse of the Cat People* has a unique subtlety. For once, nobody redundantly explains who can and who can't see the ghost. Instead, the vague role of imaginary playmate gets filled by Irena. Midway through the film, the pair of garden shots reveals that Irena has been watching over Amy. The plot creates a sympathetic spirit seeking to console a lonely child and correct

her father's plodding common sense. The dead cat woman, perhaps making amends for her urge to destroy Oliver's romance with Alice in the previous film, performs as an imaginary playmate and saves a family. The black magic of *The Cat People* is balanced by the white magic on display here.

It's a Wonderful Life (1947) is probably the era's foremost example of how afterlife fantasy could motivate unusual storytelling tactics. Firmly in the forties vein, it displays a host of common strategies, all bent to its moralizing message. Yet to convey that, it draws on a very uncommon narrative option.

The plot adopts the crisis structure for framing its central flashback. The frame is established obliquely, through a chorus of unseen characters praying for George Bailey. True to afterlife conventions, the angel Clarence is given an assignment from his superiors, but in a starry heaven that registers their conversation only through glowing points of light. The flashback tracing George's life, lasting a surprising ninety minutes, is presented, as in *Happy Land*, as a quasi-film that the angels run for Clarence's benefit. They point out things for Clarence to notice ("Something happens here you'll have to remember later") and obligingly freeze the action to study the grown-up George. Newsreel clips fill in periods of public history. The film loses its frame when Clarence materializes on the bridge where a drunk and despairing George totters, preparing to leap. Like his brethren, Clarence can present himself among the living but can also vanish in a twinkling.

The embedded story uses a minor schema of the period, the biography of the exemplary ordinary man. This plot may make its hero a vessel of national virtues, as in *An American Romance* (1944), but it can also suggest a thwarted search for fulfillment, as in the novel *Journey in the Dark* (1943). A loose approximation to *It's a Wonderful Life* is Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical *Allegro* (1947), which follows a small-town boy who admires his idealistic father but grows up to be tempted by easy money in the big city.

The Bailey saga presents a goal-oriented protagonist, but his goal is maddeningly frustrated by accidents. George wants to shake the dust of Bedford Falls from his heels, but each time

he's about to depart for the greater world, he's dragged back by family or community obligations. Trading on hindsight bias, the opening frame story makes it inevitable that George will stay in Bedford Falls, so we anticipate his efforts to leave as fruitless. That inevitability creates an unusually complex characterization. Remaining in town obliges George to come up with new goals—preserving his father's legacy, marrying Mary—both of which run counter to his most basic desires. Maintaining his father's belief in charity clashes with George's dream of being rich ("I wish I had a million dollars"), and the attachment to Mary keeps him at home.

George tries to extend his father's legacy of helping the unfortunate, but he is checked by the growing power of Mr. Potter, the town skinflint. When George's bumbling Uncle Billy loses money that would balance the books of their loan company, George is facing scandal and prison. His thwarted dreams finally explode in fury: he curses Uncle Billy and terrifies his family before storming out to get drunk. George's trembling, tearful rage at his entrapment makes him a personification of the conflicted forties hero. He ends up on the bridge, poised to jump.

Clarence's intervention leads to the era's boldest play with fantasy time. The film has already synchronized George's past with that of the audience, binding them through public events like Depression and war as well as through lifestyle details around songs and the brand names on display in the town drugstore. (A cigarette ad's slogan, "Ask Dad—He knows," impels George to run to his father for advice.) To this idealized past the film now counterposes an ugly present, the sort of parallel world that fantasy films would posit in the 1980s and after. Clarence grants George the chance to see Bedford Falls without him.

Forking-path plots, a minor literary format, had appeared in films before.[50] *Dangerous Corner* (1934) offered two versions of a cocktail party, one after the other.[51] A 1933 film, *Turn Back the Clock*, showed its anesthetized protagonist imagining a past he might have had. The "reset" device was used in Maxwell Anderson's stage piece *The Star-Wagon*, in the earlier play *One Sunday Afternoon* (1933), and in *Repeat Performance*. The possibility of counterfactual history is hinted at when the angel in *Here Comes*

Mr. Jordan (1941) advises Joe the prizefighter that he will be champ "but on another road." Still, each of these posits an alternative past or future *for* the protagonist, not an alternative present *without* him.

The switcheroo idea of deleting the hero from the alternative world altogether was the basis of Philip Van Doren Stern's original story written in 1939, sold as a film project, and eventually published in 1945 as "The Man Who Never Was."[52] In adapting it to film, Capra and his screenwriters traced the web of dependencies in which we are all suspended. However sentimentalized and overwrought the treatment, the sequence showing George's visit to a Bedford Falls, now Pottersville, in which he's a stranger has a nightmarish intensity. The town is impoverished, and the townsfolks' friendliness we've seen in the flashback is replaced by harsh selfishness.

All these films about the afterlife and love beyond death! Surely, the reflectionist critic would insist, they express a pervasive anxiety about the war and postwar reconstruction. Yet we see that supernatural forces, just like amnesia and the traumas of childhood, have secure places in popular culture's traditions, both distant and recent. Filmmakers ransacked those traditions for strategies and premises that could be combined, revised, and tweaked from film to film. Much as *Citizen Kane* synthesizes older and emergent tactics of flashback construction, *It's a Wonderful Life* blends several fantasy options. As often happens, its unique mixture is attributable not to a zeitgeist but to the filmmaker's *conception* of it. "People are numb after the catastrophic events of the past 10 to 15 years," said Capra in 1946. "I would not attempt to reach them mentally through a picture, only emotionally."[53]

The conventions initiated by the new trends could motivate the sorts of experimentation we've already seen. Semidocumentary popularized the external voice-over, while problem pictures probed subjective states. Fantasy was the natural home for embedded stories and passages hovering between hallucination and supernatural visitation. At the same time, these cycles created their own narrative innovations, ranging from the cross-sectional episodic plot of the social problem film to the play with

alternative time frames in *Repeat Performance* and *It's a Wonderful Life*.

Yet these developments were less widespread than a new approach to mystery plotting. Crime and suspense, perennials of Hollywood storytelling, took on new importance with the rise of the public's passion for Murder Culture.

CHAPTER 10

I Love a Mystery

They hire me for excitement, you understand. The kind of story they buy is apt to be pretty claptrap so the first thing they reach for is a little murder. I can fiddle around with it, raise the intellectual interest a bit, give it some attractiveness to cultivated people, but on the principle of high suspense.

James M. Cain[1]

THINK OF PROTOTYPICAL FILMS OF THE 1930S—*SWING TIME*, *IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT*, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *Nothing Sacred*, *Captain Blood*. Do we find them trafficking much in mysteries? Not really. True, there are whodunits featuring Charlie Chan, Philo Vance, and their colleagues, but these are mostly B films, and they follow the pattern of classic detective fiction. The *Thin Man* series is higher-toned, but here crime detection furnishes the pretext for marital comedy of a screwball bent.

During the 1940s, though, mystery moved squarely to the center of Hollywood storytelling. For one thing, urbane sleuths were replaced by tough private eyes and cops doggedly following procedure. More broadly, other genres, from comedies to melodramas, gained an enigmatic air they didn't have before. During the 1940s, filmmakers seemed to adopt a slogan: Whatever movie you're making, try to add a mystery.

What imbues any narrative with mystery? Essentially, mystery happens when we know that there's something important we don't know. "A story," notes critic Victor Shklovsky, "may be told in such a way that what is happening is incomprehensible to the reader."[2] If something important is quietly omitted, there can't be a mystery; there is simply suppression of information that will surprise us later. To engender mystery, the narration must nudge us to notice that something's missing.

The forties' reliance on flashbacks illustrates this new emphasis. Flashbacks aren't inherently mysterious, but they become so when the film indicates that something puzzling needs to be explained by visiting the past. *The Power and the Glory* (1933) pioneered complicated flashbacks, but *Citizen Kane* (1941) added the mystery of "Rosebud." *The Great Man's Lady* (1942) starts with reporters hounding a hundred-year-old woman to answer rumors about her relations with the town's founder, and only an innocent young woman's questions tease the truth out of her. Similarly, the flashback crisis structure may set up mysteries. Why are people praying for George Bailey at the start of *It's a Wonderful Life* (1947)? What can explain the conflicting traits of the protagonist recounted by his buddies in *Pilot #5* (1943)?

Similarly, whereas most melodramas share their characters' secrets with the audience through omniscient narration, many 1940s melodramas pose puzzles. *Three Secrets* (1950) starts when an adopted boy is stranded in the mountains after his parents are killed in a plane crash. Three women rush to the crash site, and in flashback we learn about each woman's life. Which one is the boy's birth mother? *No Man of Her Own* (1950) uses the crisis structure—a mother is called on by the police—to take us back to the reasons she wound up in this household. This plot involves both mystery and suspense: once we learn that the heroine is passing herself off as the family's daughter-in-law, we wait for the authorities to discover her identity. *A Letter to Three Wives* (1948) self-consciously draws on mystery conventions, and some reviewers considered it a bit of a whodunit.[3]

Other genres added enigmas to their standard plots. There are mystery-driven comedies (*My Favorite Brunette*, 1947; *Shadows on*

the Stair, 1941), Westerns (*Pursued*, 1947; *Coroner Creek*, 1948), war films (*Passage to Marseille*, 1944), family dramas (*The Red House*, 1947), ghost and horror stories (*The Uninvited*, 1944; *I Walked with a Zombie*, 1943), and romances (*Woman on the Beach*, 1947; *Portrait of Jennie*, 1949). Fictional biopics (*Keeper of the Flame*, 1942) and crusading exposés (*Call Northside 777*, 1948) were plotted as mysteries. As we've seen, the patients of *Spellbound* (1945), *The Dark Corner* (1946), and *The Snake Pit* (1948) harbor secrets that need to be exposed through the psychoanalyst's patient detective work. Hollywood's what-they-didn't-know-was maxim finds a consummation in mystery plots in all types of film.

What led to all this mystery-mongering? During the 1940s, mystery stories in all media became hugely popular and prestigious. Filmmakers were made aware as never before of the resources and rewards of this mode of storytelling. Just as 1930s films owed their dialogue and pacing to the reporters and playwrights who came to Hollywood with sound, the 1940s industry relied on many crime and mystery writers to supply stories. James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler, Jonathan Latimer, Dorothy B. Hughes, Vera Caspary, and others became screenwriters.[4]

At the same time the genre of the suspense novel, also known as the psychological thriller, attained a new prominence. Best sellers like *Rebecca* (1938) and *Leave Her to Heaven* (1944) lifted the mechanics of suspense to new respectability, while less celebrated books and plays provided a bedrock of familiar techniques. Transposed to cinema, the emerging thriller conventions yielded many outstanding films and created a tradition that continues to flourish in literature, cinema, and television.

By emphasizing mystery and suspense, with all the feints and snares these ingredients demand, 1940s Hollywood created a varied body of films that changed world cinema. Mystery-based storytelling encouraged the use of flashbacks, replays, voice-overs, restricted viewpoint, suppressive narration, and other techniques I've been charting. It's no accident that many of the films that serve up typical forties strategies have puzzles of character or incident at their center. And the thriller genre furnishes remarkable examples of swift schema and revision, premise and switcheroo.

MURDER CULTURE

"I Love a Mystery," announced a popular radio program. It might have been speaking for America as a whole. During the forties, the mystery genre achieved the wide popularity it still enjoys. Just as important, its influence extended beyond its usual precincts. The rise of what we might call Murder Culture in popular media shaped Hollywood cinema in ways both obvious and subtle.

As the American slick-magazine market expanded, there was a recalibration of genres. Publishers developed "category publishing," a strategy of identifying a stable public for a certain type of fiction and serving that with steady output.[5] Mysteries, Westerns, and romances, labeled as such, made up the bulk of US genre fiction in the 1940s. Their ambit widened enormously when the paperback revolution of the war years made books more affordable.

Mystery, taken in a broad sense, was by far the most popular category. A top-flight mystery would first be serialized in a slick magazine such as *Collier's*, *Cosmopolitan*, or the *Saturday Evening Post*. This market alone could bring the author a great deal of money. In 1939, Mignon G. Eberhart was getting $15,000 for a novel in installments; by the end of the war she could demand $35,000, or over $400,000 in 2016 dollars.[6] Once the serial became a book, it could count on a wide public. In 1940, 40 percent of all novels published were mysteries.[7] A best-selling mystery might have 350,000 copies in print. In 1943 alone, titles by Erle Stanley Gardner sold 4.5 million copies.[8]

These print-based platforms didn't exhaust the market. With luck, a mystery would be bought by Hollywood for adaptation. Radio mystery programs, often based on continuing characters from books, enjoyed wide success as well. By November 1945 there were thirty-one mystery shows on the air, and each day boasted at least four. The average program had over ten million listeners.

A 1946 study found that mysteries tied with adventure novels as the most popular genres with readers at all education levels.[9] Because mysteries were consumed without guilt by college-educated readers, the format attained a degree of literary respectability denied to Westerns and romances. Mysteries

were the only genre fiction regularly reviewed in the august *New York Times*. When William Faulkner needed to boost his sales, he turned his talents to a detective story, and the result, *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), became his first best seller as well as a striking 1949 film.[10]

The genre became a mega-genre. Publishers devoted entire imprints to mystery fiction, tailoring product lines to readers' tastes. *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, the first of many brand-name crime magazines, began in 1941. A few years later writers banded together in the Mystery Writers of America, a professional association that took as its motto "Crime does not pay . . . enough."

With competition intensifying, mystery writers were forever chasing novelty. The puzzle-driven detective story had long played host to formal experiment. As Ben Hecht put it, mystery novels "are ingenious because they have to be."[11] An entire novel might be devoted to trial testimony or a collage of diaries. Pat McGerr made her reputation by avoiding the question of whodunit and asking instead who was killed (*Pick Your Victim*, 1947). A detective story might be told from the viewpoint of a ghost (*Dead to the World*, 1947) or a man sealed in a coffin (*It's My Own Funeral*, 1944). This urge to explore far-fetched methods of storytelling spread to cinema as well.

PLOTTING MYSTERY

What craft choices confront a mystery writer? Start with plot and narration. Given a crime-based plot, you can organize the action and the viewpoint around four roles: the investigator, the bystanders, the criminal, and the victim (or victims). All these options were explored in pre-1940s fiction and stage plays.

The classic detective story follows the sleuth and his associates as they investigate. As a result, our range of knowledge is typically limited to theirs. We might be attached solely to the detective, as in first-person hard-boiled tales. Or we might observe the investigation from the standpoint of a helper; the prototype is Watson's chronicling of Sherlock Holmes's exploits. In the 1930s some novelists, notably John Dickson Carr, focused the plot on

bystanders who might be suspects or witnesses. They could also serve as helpers in the master detective's inquiry.

Similar approaches were taken in Hollywood cinema. From Philo Vance and Perry Mason to Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and Philip Marlowe in *Murder, My Sweet* (1944), the action is presented as an investigation, and we are often attached almost wholly to the detective's range of knowledge. The same investigation-based plotting ruled the police procedural in both fiction and film.

Alternatively, certain bystanders might bear the brunt of attached point of view. *I Wake Up Screaming* (1941) organizes its plot around the suspects in a high-profile murder. In its pure state this is a fairly rare option, since in films that begin with this premise—*Lady on a Train* (1945), *Shock* (1946), *The Window* (1949)—the bystander may become a witness and, soon, a potential victim. *Rear Window* (1954) is perhaps the purest instance of the bystander plot, with the witness becoming a target only in the final moments.[12]

Another option is to organize your plot around the criminal's actions and range of knowledge. This banishes the whodunit component but raises other possibilities. (Why was the crime committed? How, if at all, will the criminal be caught?) Some celebrated novels, such as *Crime and Punishment* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, favored the criminal's perspective, but this strategy took a while to emerge in American popular film. Outside the gangster genre, films rarely focused on the malefactor, except in the subgenre devoted to sympathetic gentleman crooks, as in *Raffles* (1930). In the 1920s and 1930s, however, the criminal's standpoint governed the narration of several significant novels, including *Payment Deferred* (1926; film 1932), *Malice Aforethought* (1931), and *The Murder of My Aunt* (1935). On the stage, Patrick Hamilton showed the possibilities of centering the action on a murder plan in *Rope* (1929), while his 1941 novel *Hangover Square* would develop the psychology of the criminal more intimately.

The last possibility, presenting the action from the standpoint of the victim or victim-to-be, was most fully explored by female writers. Mary Roberts Rinehart's *The Circular Staircase* (1908) and Marie Belloc Lowndes's *The Lodger* (1913) put women in peril

at the center of their plots. The tradition they founded was continued into the 1930s by Mignon G. Eberhart, Mabel Seeley, and others. The effect these writers aimed for is encapsulated by the US title of a 1942 Ethel Lina White novel: *Her Heart in Her Throat*.

Admirers of detective fiction had long favored the puzzle tale centering on a male detective and his deductive prowess. The climate changed with *Rebecca*. Upon its publication in 1938, the novel became immensely successful and sold over a million copies in the next decade—far more than any orthodox mystery. It gave respectability to the long-standing "women's fiction" technique of organizing a plot around a female bystander or potential victim. The gynocentric thriller, associated with Eberhart and Rinehart, gained prominence in the hands of Charlotte Armstrong, Doris Miles Disney, Margaret Millar, and others.

Many readers found that these writers' plots were more gripping than the classic tale of detection. Mystery was still involved—there were inexplicable events, or uncertainties about whom to trust—but the emphasis fell less on the solution of a puzzle and more on the fear of becoming a victim. Suspense became sharply focused on action that threatened the protagonist and made the reader fear the worst. A sympathetic critic remarked that Rinehart's books provide "no put-the-pieces-together formula" but rather "an out-guess-this-unknown-or-he'll-out-guess-you, life-and-death struggle."[13] Now what one critic called the "romantic-feminine school of crime fiction" had invaded the best-seller lists.[14]

The masculine parallel to the women's novels isn't the hard-boiled detective fiction of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. That format simply updated the classic puzzle-inquiry-solution model. The male versions of the threatened-woman narrative were the oblique and tormented tales of Cornell Woolrich, John Franklin Bardin, David Goodis, and Georges Simenon (frequently translated in the 1940s). These authors plunged their men into urban settings at once everyday and menacing and then put them on the run, pursued by police, gangsters, and freelance killers.

Meanwhile, Graham Greene, Eric Ambler, Manning Coles, and Helen MacInnes had transposed anxiety-driven plotting to

the tale of international intrigue. Their protagonists were not professional spies or freelance adventurers like the Saint, but rather ordinary men and women caught up in dangers they only dimly understood. Describing one of his novels as "a mild attempt at realism," Ambler rebuked sensationalist espionage: "There are no professional devils, and the only Britisher in the story is anything but stalwart."[15]

Sizing up all these trends, Mitchell Wilson could write in 1947, "Within the past ten years we have been witnessing a new form of popular fiction—the story of suspense."[16] It was promoted as such. Simon and Schuster's "Inner Sanctum" logo identified "a novel of suspense, a novel of crime and punishment rather than a novel of crime and detection."[17] The radio program *Suspense*, which began regular broadcasting in 1942, asked aspiring writers to provide plots based on tense, "precarious" situations while avoiding "plain 'who-dun-its' or detective stories" and "fantastic horror-yarns involving zombies, ghosts, etc."[18]

In Hollywood cinema, the brilliant sleuth had enjoyed a brief vogue in the 1930s, but by the 1940s Charlie Chan, Ellery Queen, and even Sherlock Holmes were relegated to the B-picture realm. Hollywood discovered that mysteries along other lines provided better alternatives. Paired investigators, often a husband and wife in the *Thin Man* vein, could yield comedic values. More important, tension-driven plots could furnish projects at all budget levels. The suspense thriller, with an imperiled woman or a pursued man or a fascinating killer at the center, would become a prime genre of American cinema ever after.

MEN AND WOMEN, FEAR IS THE SAME

To a considerable degree the literary thriller was an import. America's pulp writers were popularizing the hard-boiled detective, but in Britain, home of the cozy baffler, other options were emerging. Anthony Berkeley Cox (aka Francis Iles), with *Malice Aforethought* (1931) and *Before the Fact* (1932), popularized the domestic murder novel told from the standpoint of killer or victim. The result was a plot leading up to the commission of the crime. Here is the famous opening of *Before the Fact*: "Some women give

birth to murderers, some go to bed with them, and some marry them. Lina Aysgarth had lived with her husband for nearly eight years before she realized that she was married to a murderer."[19] Narrating the events that led up to Lina's realization made the book a prototype of what came to be called the suspense thriller.

At the same time, murder was being domesticated on the English stage. The vogue seems to have started in the late 1920s, when, as a *New York Times* correspondent put it, London suffered "a theatrical crime wave . . . owing to a deluge of mystery plays and 'thrillers.'"[20] Several of these plays were detective stories and sensation pieces, many from Edgar Wallace. But audiences were also treated to *The Letter* (1927), *Blackmail* (1928), *Rope* (1929), and other popular "murder plays."[21] The genre continued in both London and New York with successes such as *Payment Deferred* (1932), *Night Must Fall* (1935), *Gaslight* (1938), and *Kind Lady* (1935).[22]

A new label came to be attached to these dramas of homebred homicide. When Val Gielgud wrote to Patrick Hamilton requesting a new BBC radio drama, he suggested that "a psychological thriller along the lines of 'Rope' would be good."[23] The phrase came into currency during the 1930s to describe domestic thrillers in fiction, on stage, and on screen, and plays began advertising themselves with the label.[24]

Why the emphasis on psychology? Chiefly, I suspect, to distinguish these plays from the blood-and-thunder sensation of Edgar Wallace and the extroverted adventures of John Buchan. In these writers' work, "thriller" had come to suggest a tale of international intrigue overseen by sinister figures bent on world domination. A more psychological focus also suited the stage. In West End productions, drawing-room murder on the Ilesian model was easy to dramatize. If the plot divulges the plotter or killer from the start, the emphasis falls naturally on why the crime is committed and whether the guilty party will escape.

Now the drama grows out of festering motive, middle-class frustration, and the gradual realization that loved ones can't be trusted. The 1920s-30s detective story, with its "least likely suspect" surprise, had relied on the idea that anyone could be a murderer, but the psychological thriller developed this idea in depth.

The theme was doubtless accelerated by much publicized murders committed by solid citizens, notably Dr. H. H. Crippen, Leopold and Loeb, and baby-faced Sidney Fox (inspiration for *Night Must Fall*). These fictions replaced the Napoleonic masterminds of sensation thrillers by a sense that humdrum life harbored lethal passions.

Some American filmmakers tapped the British vein by adapting the domestic thrillers *Kind Lady* (1935), *Night Must Fall* (1937), and *A Rage in Heaven* (1941) and the hunted-man chase film *This Gun for Hire* (1942). But Alfred Hitchcock became the chief importer of the British conception of the thriller. He had gained fame by adapting an early murderer-in-the-household tale, *The Lodger* (1926), and following it up with *Blackmail* (1929) and the courtroom drama *Murder!* (1930). With his scenarist Charles Bennett he had mastered the tale of spy intrigue in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), *The 39 Steps* (1935), *Secret Agent* (1936), and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938). Most of these were adaptations of mass-market plays or novels. Hitchcock and Bennett turned a conventional detective story into a man-on-the-run tale in *Young and Innocent* (1937) and made Conrad's novel *Secret Agent* a suspense exercise in *Sabotage* (1936).

Several of these films were popular in America, at least among the cognoscenti, and Hitchcock's arrival in Hollywood gave great impetus to the emerging suspense genre. With astonishing speed he turned out five films that crystallized both the male and female versions of the victim-centered narrative. Adapting his *39 Steps* format, he followed men on the run across Europe (*Foreign Correspondent*, 1940) and America (*Saboteur*, 1942). At the other pole, *Rebecca* (1940) set the tenor for 1940s woman-in-peril plots, with *Suspicion* (1941), drawn from *Before the Fact*, furnishing another variant. *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) adroitly blended both narrative options, with a man on the run going to ground, where he becomes a menace to a young woman and her family.

From 1943 on, stories of suspense came into their own. In November 1944 the *Hollywood Reporter* indicated that major studios had eighteen high-budget thrillers under way. Two years later there were over fifty projects in development.[25] Now it seemed that thrillers had achieved adult appeal.[26] Some were B pictures,

while others could be treated with top production values.[27] It proved to be a cycle that never ended, becoming a permanent mainstay of Hollywood cinema.

The trend was sustained largely through adaptations of novels and plays. *Gaslight* was filmed in 1944, *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* and *Love from a Stranger* in 1947, *Kind Lady* in 1951. Other revivals included the Gothic classics *Jane Eyre* (1944) and *The Woman in White* (1948) and the Edwardian books *The Lodger* (1944) and *The House by the River* (1950). Graham Greene's literary "entertainments" provided the basis for not only *This Gun for Hire* but also *Ministry of Fear* (1944) and *The Confidential Agent* (1945). From Eric Ambler's somber spy thrillers came *Journey into Fear* (1943) and *The Mask of Dimitrios* (1944). Novels by Dorothy B. Hughes supplied *The Fallen Sparrow* (1943) and *Ride the Pink Horse* (1947). Woolrich, Armstrong, Caspary, and many other thriller novelists found their work turned into movies.[28] Lucille Fletcher's radio play *Sorry, Wrong Number* became virtually an annual broadcasting event before becoming a 1948 film. Elisabeth Sanxay Holding, called by Raymond Chandler "the top suspense writer of them all," wrote the novel that would become *The Reckless Moment* (1949).[29] And of course Hollywood developed original thrillers as well.

The trade press noted the shift away from detection and toward psychological mysteries. A 1944 *Variety* article claimed that

> The typical tale in the new genre crawls with living horror, is eerie with something impending, and socks its suspense thrill well along toward the middle of the story, instead of doing the crime victim in at the beginning and then building a whodunit and a detective quiz as the element of suspense.[30]

Crucial in all cases was a person in peril. "The trend is toward emotion, excitement, suspense . . . toward 'What is going to happen to this protagonist?' "[31]

Many of the films' plots, as we'd expect from their literary antecedents, thrust vulnerable women into a forbidding household. "A Gothic," observed the crime novelist Donald Westlake years later, "is a story about a girl who gets a house."[32] So we have

Experiment Perilous (1944), *Dark Waters* (1944), *Undercurrent* (1946), *Dragonwyck* (1946), *The Spiral Staircase* (1946), *Sleep, My Love* (1948), and several other films anchored in ominous homes. While women-centered films tend to center on a household, men on the run operate in a big landscape, a city or several cities. With a male protagonist the suspense story could yield something like *Conflict* (1945), *Scarlet Street* (1945), *The Chase* (1946), *They Won't Believe Me* (1947), *The Big Clock* (1948), *Take One False Step* (1949), *Out of the Past* (1947), and *The Second Woman* (1950).

The 1944 *Variety* article noticed that the new thriller format dealt with insanity, "unpredictable in its attack; frightful in its effect among the companion characters."[33] Hitchcock had helped popularize domestic madness in films with *Shadow of a Doubt*, which settled a beguiling serial killer snugly into small-town America. The B realm of horror had presented mad scientists, of course, but a ripe set of A releases, including *The Lodger* (1943), *Laura* (1944), *Gaslight* (1944), *Hangover Square* (1945), and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945), presented demented characters outside their traditional lairs, no longer prowling castles and underground laboratories but now gliding through cocktail parties and swank restaurants. Psychoanalysis became a natural ally in *Spellbound* (1945), *Bewitched* (1945), *The Locket* (1947), *Possessed* (1947), and other psychiatricals. Freudian motifs firmly lodged themselves in the domestic thriller.

Today we would accept my gender-based groupings and distinguish Gothic romances from film noirs. But these labels were devised by later critics. In the forties, any of the films I've mentioned might have been called thrillers, shockers, melodramas, even horror films. The 1944 *Variety* article lumps together *Rebecca*, *Phantom Lady*, *Gaslight*, *Dark Waters*, *Mask of Dimitrios*, *Hangover Square*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as examples of the "new horrifier." For another writer *The Spiral Staircase*, *Bedlam* (1946), *Man Hunt* (1941), and *The Beast with Five Fingers* (1947) all counted as horror films, suspense films, chillers, and thrillers.[34]

Recognizing contemporary perception on this front helps us understand why individual films may mix and vary story schemas. For example, *Phantom Lady* as both novel and film (1944)

depends on a properly victimized, perhaps paranoid noir hero; but he is rescued by his girlfriend, who then becomes a classic woman in peril. The men can become victims in a way Sherlock Holmes or Charlie Chan did not, and the hard-boiled protagonist can be as vulnerable as any girl with a house.

Within this vast assemblage iconography also serves as a binding factor. Poison, in wine or milk or coffee, is a mainstay. Portraits, often of the dead, loom over the action or become haunting miniatures, as in the image of the beloved brother treasured by Jack the Ripper in *The Lodger*. A man may fall in love with a portrait (*Laura*) or paint the woman in his life as spellbinding (*The Locket*) or horrifying (*The Two Mrs. Carrolls*).[35] Staircases, seldom used as sites of action in 1930s films, encourage dramas of aggression and domination, as in Mildred Pierce's slap contest with Veda, or Louise's imaginary attack on her stepdaughter in *Possessed*. They're also handy for suicide attempts, homicide, and rapid escape. The vindictive wife in *Leave Her to Heaven* (1946) flings herself downstairs with the aim of killing her unborn child.

MASTERING SUSPENSE

Storytellers began to sketch the design features of the new genre. Novelists and critics agreed that the thriller was neither a detective story nor an adventure story. They commonly pointed out that modern suspense was different from the sort that's aroused by all storytelling.

Suspense in general entails uncertainty about the outcome of the action, often coupled with a concern that things turn out well for the characters we favor. This basic suspense will of course be present in a great many films. But for the thriller writers and screenwriters, suspense meant something more specific. That meaning is best captured, I think, by Patricia Highsmith, who proposed that suspense entailed "a threat of impending violent action."[36] In the purest cases of 1940s suspense, a sympathetic character is put in great danger and pitted against a menace that will stop at nothing. Most thrillers mixed this threat-based suspense with mysteries big or small.

While other genres, such as the war film, put their characters

in danger, the psychological thriller makes suspense the dominant emotion of the film. It demands that the film focus on the potential victim. Spotlighting the person in jeopardy, Mitchell Wilson maintained, would increase identification. He noted a key ingredient that had dominated the older Rinehart-Eberhart model: prolonged description of what fear feels like.[37] That fear grows steadily throughout the plot. Wilson stresses the need for moments when the victim struggles against the menace.

> The framework of the suspense story is the continual struggle of the frightened protagonist to fight back and save himself in spite of his pervading anxiety, and in this respect he is truly heroic. The action of the story does not consist in mere activity, but in the hero's change of mood in response to changing circumstances.

Now the thriller becomes resolutely psychological. The character in peril must recognize the danger, respond to it as we would (with fear), and then think about ways to escape it or defeat it. The threat and the attempts to conquer it will gain greater emotional power in the course of the action, as in *My Name Is Julia Ross* and *Sorry, Wrong Number*.

Highsmith's conception of oncoming harm captured a crucial feature of the suspense film, while Mitchell Wilson pointed up some basic plot structures and emotional registers. Other writers mentioned specific compositional factors, such as the need for a time limit or deadline to maximize the tension.[38] Hazel Sullivan suggested that there was "inevitability" suspense.[39] Here the outcome is very likely, and most of the suspense revolves around how and why the action leads there. Sullivan's example is *The Lodger*, the tale of a serial killer bound to be exposed.

Probably the most famous rules of thumb were proposed by Hitchcock. Since the 1930s, in writings and interviews he had expounded on the art of filmic suspense. In these he had echoed Highsmith's and Wilson's emphasis on danger. Most famously, he stressed the superiority of suspense to surprise.[40] By this he meant the need to create a hierarchy of knowledge so that the viewer knows a little more about the situation than the victim

does. In practice, absolute equality of knowledge between victim and viewer is rare. Most suspense films confine us largely to the protagonist's range of knowledge, but at certain points we break away to learn things—usually menacing things—that he or she doesn't know.

Just as mystery became an ingredient of many genres, so did suspense. Social problem films like *Intruder in the Dust* (1950) and *The Snake Pit* build on the threat of harm to innocent victims. *The Well* (1951) creates harrowing suspense by showing a little girl's disappearance and then tracing how escalating responses to it bring a community to the brink of a race riot. At the midpoint, the plot switches to showing how the townsfolk unite to rescue the girl from the well. This phase arouses maximum tension by restricting us solely to what the townspeople know. Is she dead or alive?

Even comedy can indulge in thriller-based suspense. *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944), in which a farcical plot centers on the killers and a bystander, relies on fretful anticipation. If Mortimer can't get his daffy aunts committed to Happy Dale, they'll go the electric chair. And everyone in the household is subject to Highsmith's "impending violent action" threatened by the warped brother Jonathan and his grubby assistant Dr. Einstein. Arguably, the body in the Brewster window seat engenders as much suspense as the encased corpse in *Rope*, although the suspense is leavened with amusement. What made the play and film original was a pure switcheroo: the threat of murder among aunties' doilies and afternoon sherry.

SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVILS

"One murder makes a villain. Millions, a hero. Numbers sanctify, my good fellow." Few viewers would have expected to hear this jaunty declaration from the actor who played the most popular character in film history. But the rise of the suspense thriller made even Charlie Chaplin embark on a project in which he played a charming serial killer. Nothing better shows how pervasive Murder Culture had become in the American cinema.

Making the protagonist a lone amateur killer was quite new to Hollywood. True, we had the gangster, but he operated as part of a criminal organization, and the rise of the G-man film had more or less eliminated him. He would return as an outlaw (*White Heat*, 1948), as a target of a rogue cop, or as a lone hoodlum or a man on the run (*Out of the Past*, 1947) or on the way out (*I Walk Alone*, 1948), and as a walk-on in other genres, such as comedies, boxing movies, and heist films.

The perpetrator might be male or female. The forties has bequeathed to world cinema some of its greatest lady murderers, from Brigid O'Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) to Ellen Berent of *Leave Her to Heaven*, who kills her husband's brother and her unborn child before setting up clues to frame her husband for her own death. She joins the company of the calculating poisoner of *Ivy* (1947) and the dutiful housekeeper-strangler of *Ladies in Retirement* (1941). The thriller's remorseless demands spare no one.

How can a plot centered on someone bent on murder engender the fear of impending violence that Highsmith and Mitchell Wilson claim is central to suspense? One option is for the plot to remind us of the victim's plight. If we watch someone scheming to kill someone else, suspense may arise because of our sympathy for the target. In *Leave Her to Heaven*, we are in on Ellen's plans to remove her husband's brother as a rival. She encourages the boy to swim beyond his capacity, and she sits in the rowboat on the lake as he is stricken by a cramp and begins to flounder. The suspense is keen: Will the lad drown?

A concern for the victim is central to the effect of *The Lodger* (1944). The original novel, and to some extent Hitchcock's 1926 adaptation, concentrated on the bystanders—the residents of the house where the Jack the Ripper figure lives. The film does much the same thing, almost never showing us the sinister Mr. Slade alone and never giving us access to his thoughts. As a result, we register the sense of impending harm when Kitty, the daughter of the couple renting the room, innocently trusts the lodger. In its narrational organization, *The Lodger* resembles the classic woman-in-peril film, with Slade serving as the demented hus-

band and the Scotland Yard inspector as the helper male. Some will argue that by the end we feel a bit of sympathy for the lodger himself, wounded and baying at the night before toppling into the dark waters he has yearned for.

More often, sympathy for the criminal protagonist will depend on the character's moral temper and the forces that lead to the crime. At one end of the scale we find virtuous characters pressured by circumstances. Take *The Suspect* (1945), a classic tale of the henpecked husband who longs for escape. After a crisis in his marriage, Philip Marshall becomes friendly with Mary and sees her almost every night. His shrewish wife won't divorce him, however, and when she finds out about Mary she vows to make both Philip and Mary lose their jobs. Throughout all this we are almost completely attached to him, and he is a thoroughly sympathetic character. Driven beyond endurance on Christmas Eve, Philip looks up at his wife on the staircase and hefts his cane. Fade out.

The Suspect's complicating action starts with the wife's funeral. Immediately the inquisitive Inspector Huxley visits and announces that he knows the wife was murdered. Now enters the menace that will create suspense in the remainder of the film. In a sequence that intensifies our attachment to Philip, the policeman reenacts the crime on the staircase. We watch him from Philip's optical viewpoint, and Huxley's voice-off recitation of events is unnaturally loud and close to us. All he needs is to find motive, Huxley says, and Philip will hang. But Philip blocks him; in a rare departure from his range of knowledge, he surprises Huxley, and us, by marrying Mary "offstage" so she can't testify against him.

Huxley's machinations, unknown to Philip, come to the fore when he persuades Philip's neighbor, a dissolute wife-beater named Simmons, to offer evidence. Perpetually needing money, Simmons approaches Philip and demands money to keep quiet. Philip poisons him and then is pressed to conceal the body behind a sofa when neighbors arrive unexpectedly. (An echo of Hamilton's play *Rope*, perhaps.) An ellipsis akin to that covering the wife's murder and Philip's marriage conceals exactly how

Philip gets the body out of the house, but now he's even more vulnerable.

Philip, pudgy and older than Mary, elicits our sympathy partly because we know his opportunities for a late-life romance would normally be paltry. His kind nature has called out genuine affection from an attractive young woman. The parallel situation next door, with Edith abused by her husband Simmons, sharpens our attachment to our protagonist. Like Philip, she is a gentle person trapped in her marriage, and Philip has done her a good turn by killing her tormentor. Like many literary thrillers, the film induces us to treat the act of murder as good riddance.

Our sympathy surges at the climax, when Philip and Mary are about to emigrate to Canada. But Inspector Huxley comes on board as well and tells Philip that Simmons's body has been discovered and that Edith will be hanged for his murder. Our attachment to Philip breaks a final time as Huxley waits on the pier. He has lied about the case against Edith in the hope that Philip's inherent decency will drive him to disembark and confess. It does.

The Suspect shows one way a suspense film can obey the Production Code and still yield a complex experience. Murder has not been glorified, and Philip must pay for his crime. Official morality is appeased. Yet once Philip becomes a killer, he is hounded by a relentless investigator. Since Philip is meek, he is vulnerable in a way that arouses sympathy and suspense. The adroitness with which he avoids harm to himself and others is deeply satisfying. In the end, nothing stops us from seeing the film as the story of an admirable man who turns murderer to protect others and to achieve some small, ordinary happiness for himself.

Circumstances can make the criminal sympathetic in another way: if he is in the grip of uncontrollable impulses. The prototype is Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll, who was incarnated in a 1941 film version. An even more sympathetic figure is the altruistic scientist in *If I Hang* (1940). He kills four people because he has been injected with the blood of a murderer, but the injections have been part of an experiment to increase human longevity. *The Brighton Strangler* (1945) likewise gives us a likable actor who,

brain-damaged during the London Blitz, reenacts his onstage role as a serial murderer.

Probably the most pathetic compulsive killer of the period is found in John Brahm's *Hangover Square* (1945). George Bone, a brilliant composer, is subject to blackouts triggered by discordant noises. The film begins with him in a trance stabbing a pawnbroker and accidentally setting the pawnshop on fire. When he comes back to normal, Bone consults a friendly doctor at Scotland Yard to see if he might have been the killer. Assured that he wasn't, he can go on to finish the concerto he's writing for a salon performance.

Our sympathy for Bone is deepened when he falls prey to a crooked lyricist and an ambitious showgirl, Netta Longdon. After he learns that Netta has no intention of marrying him, his stress makes him susceptible to the discordant crash of musical instruments. In another trance he kills Netta and burns her body on a Guy Fawkes bonfire. When he returns to normal, he recognizes no gap in his life and returns to his concerto. On the night of the premiere he is pursued by the police doctor, who wants to put him in a sanatorium. Bone finishes his performance as the salon around him is engulfed in flames.

Patrick Hamilton's original novel, thrusting us into the mind and senses of a schizophrenic, deploys mildly modernist stylistic techniques and even some cinematic references. The film of *Hangover Square* is less ambitious, but it does exploit 1940s conventions of subjectivity. Not only are we restricted almost completely to Bone's perspective, but we get woozy optical POV shots during his amnesiac phases and vaporous flashback images of his crime. More unusual is the sound track, which amplifies and distorts the noises that trigger his blackouts and treats his concerto, a brooding, dissonant piece, as the expression of his mental disturbance.[41] The mad genius is a stereotype of popular culture, and *Hangover Square*'s percussive score evokes both Bone's mania and his ability to create convulsive beauty.

Along the middle of the sympathy scale comes a case in which a protagonist commits a crime by accident. *Detour* (1945) provides an instance, as do *The Accused* (1949) and *The Sound of Fury* (1951). Another example is *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1950). Mark

Dixon is a sullen police detective who enjoys roughing up suspects. He accidentally kills a war veteran turned petty gambler. Now, for once, Dixon can plead justification; he defended himself with a simple punch. Instead of reporting what happened, however, Dixon covers up the death and dumps the body in the river. We're not sorry to see the woman-beating wastrel go, but Dixon coolly proceeds to frame a more vicious gangster for the deed.

Where the Sidewalk Ends does not plunge into Dixon's mind; the film refrains from mental subjectivity and even optical point of view. The narration encourages us to treat Dixon as a mixture of impulsive violence and cold calculation. Not until late in the film do we learn crucial information: Dixon has become a rogue cop because his father was a gangster and he felt he had to prove himself the enforcer of law. And now, after our attitude has softened, he reveals his plan. He will force the gangster to kill him. This will condemn the kingpin and exonerate the main suspect in the man's death, the father of the woman Dixon loves. At the climax, when he writes a farewell letter explaining his decision, we finally get a subjective voice-over exposing his deepest motives for what he has done since the beginning of the film. As with the killer in *The Suspect*, the protagonist's final self-sacrifice somewhat mitigates his crime—and in Dixon's case his character flaws.

MULTIPLE INDEMNITIES

Put aside virtuous and accidental killers. There remain thoroughly bad guys, and in the 1940s a few films make them the protagonists. The most influential exercise was *Double Indemnity* (1944), which introduced the possibility of focusing on the murderer's plot and its unfolding. It was hailed as a triumph of suspense, but of what sort?

There are moments of impending menace, in Highsmith's sense, as the investigation closes in on Walter Neff and Phyllis Dietrichson. And we may fear their getting caught, whatever moral qualms we have about their behavior. Yet I think the primary sort of suspense at work depends on inevitability. Cain was famous for his "doom" novels, and this quality is supplied by the flashback structure and Neff's confession. We know the insur-

10.1. *Double Indemnity* (1944): At this point Neff doesn't know Phyllis is hiding behind his apartment door, but he'll soon register her presence and shift the door to shield her from Keyes.

ance scheme failed because Neff is dictating the story for the benefit of his colleague Keyes. "I didn't get the money, and I didn't get the woman." The question is, How did Neff and Phyllis fail?

Like most of *Rebecca* and all of *Suspicion*, *Double Indemnity* is rigorously confined to the protagonist's range of knowledge. We've seen that suspense thrillers typically open out to let us know some things that are happening beyond the protagonist's ken. In this film, only two moments widen our view. Phyllis is on her way to Neff's apartment when Keyes unexpectedly shows up and announces that he can't accept that Dietrichson died accidentally. A brief shot in the corridor shows Phyllis pausing at the door and listening to Keyes's outburst. Abruptly she ducks behind the door just as it opens to let both men into the hall. This delay-based suspense is sustained as Keyes pauses at the elevator (fig. 10.1). Later, we shift away from Neff more extensively as Phyllis prepares for their ultimate rendezvous by slipping a pistol under a chair cushion. Yet even this is justified by Neff's framing voice-over, which declares this as his later realization: "What I didn't know was that she had plans of her own."

More common in the criminal-centered format is the fluctuating range of knowledge we have come to expect in other types of thrillers. *Bluebeard* (1944) distributes information among several characters who gradually come to understand the puppeteer-painter behind the murders. *The House by the River* (1950) focuses the woman-in-peril plot from the husband's perspective. Attempting to seduce a maid, he accidentally kills her and then decides to sink her body in the river. The action is almost wholly

concentrated on the husband's efforts to conceal his crime and then to silence his wife. As if in response to the centrality of the husband, the wife is exceptionally oblivious to the danger she's in, and the helper male is of very little help, apparently preferring suicide.

Patrick Hamilton helped popularize the woman-in-peril schema with *Angel Street*, the source of *Gaslight*, and provided the paradigmatic unbalanced killer in the novel *Hangover Square*. He also provided a template of the cold-blooded protagonist in his 1929 play *Rope*. Two young men, Brandon and Phillip, kill a friend, essentially to show that men of great intelligence are free of moral constraints. They stuff the corpse into a chest, which they use as a buffet table during a party for the victim's friends and relations.

The play has always been regarded as a piece of macabre entertainment and a paradigm of a certain sort of suspense. Again, there is little of the impending menace Highsmith finds characteristic of the gripping thriller. Although the killers frighten us, the people at the party are in no danger. True, Phillip, the weaker of the two killers, gets rattled as the evening wears on, but again it is hard for the viewer to share his apprehension. The characters are in suspense, wondering what's delaying the arrival of David Kentley, the victim, but we aren't; his death was shown, fairly shockingly, at the outset.

Again we have inevitability suspense: How will the killers be revealed? Hitchcock's 1948 adaptation of the play, presenting the action in eleven lengthy shots, achieves its effects through the narrational dynamic we should expect: a play between knowledge held by the protagonist(s) and events that occur outside their ken. But that dynamic, as in *Double Indemnity*, is tightly regulated.

Because of the paired protagonists and the limited locale—a parlor and adjacent corridor, with glimpses of a dining room and kitchen beyond—virtually the entire film restricts us to what is known to Brandon, Phillip or both. Hitchcock's camera often moves among the party guests to carve out singles, two-shots, and trio shots, but usually the two criminals are in the frame, or just outside it, hearing and seeing what's displayed for us. There are exceptions, though. At one point two guests, former lovers

thrown together by Brandon's maneuvering, share their concerns about David's absence. At another point, a famous bit of suspense, the killers chat with their guests and don't notice that the maid who's clearing away the buffet is preparing to open the chest.

The crucial detours from the killers' perspective center on their old tutor, Rupert Cadell. Out of earshot, Rupert questions the maid about what happened before the party and, as he prepares to leave, discovers that she has accidentally given him a hat bearing the initials D.K. From there the inevitability suspense tightens, culminating in two moments of revelation: when Rupert raises the lid of the chest and looks inside, and when he realizes that Brandon's rationale for the crime is a distorted version of the intellectual arrogance he passed along to the boys. Remarkably, all the moments when Rupert is outside the ken of the protagonists total a mere hundred seconds or so. Like *Double Indemnity*, *Rope* shows just how strictly thriller narration can confine itself to the criminals' viewpoint, but even a slight expansion in our knowledge is crucial to creating suspense.

When Chaplin as Monsieur Verdoux in the 1947 film of that name claimed that numbers sanctify, he was offering a traditional but audacious rationale. Fifteen killings may pale beside Hiroshima and Auschwitz, but they were shocking when enacted by the world's most beloved filmmaker. After Orson Welles suggested a project based on the serial wife-murderer Henri Landru, Chaplin's decision was a sign of the central place of the thriller in forties cinema. That Chaplin also came up with a highly original movie testifies to the flexibility of this still crystallizing genre.

From one angle, *Monsieur Verdoux* is far more conventionally structured than *Double Indemnity* and *Rope*. It is, in its sedate way, a man-on-the-run plot, and as usual it builds traditional suspense by alternating scenes centered on Verdoux with scenes of the police investigation. It's also a woman-in-peril plot, with Verdoux playing the homicidal husband over and over. What the subtitle calls a "Comedy of Murders" allows Chaplin to treat both plot schemas unseriously.

Two of the women aren't the usual meek victims of domineering men. Madame Grosnay strongly resists Verdoux's wooing and eventually escapes death through comic coincidence,

10.2. *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947): As he tears up the Girl's card, the serial killer shares a look of elegant resignation with the viewer.

when Verdoux flees their wedding party. More tenacious is the boisterous Annabella, whom, thanks to preposterous luck, Verdoux simply can't kill. As a man on the run, Verdoux evades the police by switching identities, and when he is cornered on a train, by suavely poisoning the policeman who has arrested him. At his wedding party, a moment of Hitchcockian suspense—Annabella turns up there and can denounce him—is played as a dodgy chase culminating in Verdoux's vault over the garden wall. The film's climax is a travesty of the conventional capture. At a nightclub, Verdoux has been spotted by a victim's family. Instead of fleeing, he strolls in to face his fate (fig. 10.2). But when the police arrive, they at first fail to recognize him, and his arrest is punctuated by a comic fistfight.

While turning the suspense plot into comedy, Chaplin also found an original way to structure the action. Your usual serial killer works, as the term indicates, one victim at a time. Instead of succession, however, Chaplin gives us braiding. The story line involving Thelma, the victim eliminated at the outset, is maintained by her family's search for Verdoux. Verdoux's pursuit of Madame Grosnay is taken up at intervals across the film; introduced early on, she finally accepts his proposal over an hour into the running time. In the meantime, Verdoux disposes of Lydia but visits and revisits Annabella, with frustrating results. Threaded into these murder schemes are Verdoux's returns to his wife and son and his encounter with the Girl, whose life he spares only to meet her years later, when she has become a courtesan.

Chaplin realized that a simple falling-domino pattern would

not build interest as securely as interwoven relationships that he could develop in parallel. And to shuttle us from one story line to another, he resorts to identical rapid shots of churning train wheels—a way of building the pace at the same time as it becomes a running-gag mockery of a cliché.[42] The train wheels are even slipped in between scenes of Verdoux on trial and facing execution, when he isn't going anywhere.

The interwoven story lines also introduce us to the phases of Verdoux's courtship strategy, though out of order. At the start we see the result of his regimen: Thelma disappears and her body is incinerated. Then we see Verdoux's flirtation tactics. He seeks to charm Madame Grosnay when she comes to inspect his villa for rent. The killing of the grumpy Lydia demonstrates Verdoux's sustaining strategy: long-term marriages to many women, one to be finished off when he needs cash. At this point we might ask what's compelling him to kill, so Chaplin introduces his wife and child and his purported motive. This creates some sympathy, especially when we learn that the Depression threw Verdoux out of his bank job. Thereafter we meet Annabella, who reveals to us the costs of a long-term fake marriage. Once we've surveyed all the stages of the Verdoux method, the plot needs a new engine. That's supplied by our hero's discovery of the poison that doesn't leave a trace. At the same time, the police are closing in, and Verdoux escapes only by testing his new method of murder on a cop.

After Verdoux has lost everything—wife and son, money and home—the plot becomes the inevitable progress toward his capture. That and his trial are played out against the canvas of a Europe preparing for catastrophe. In another reworking of 1940s conventions, Chaplin has begun his film with Verdoux as a dead narrator. "What follows," he says, "is history." Chaplin managed to make the criminal-centered thriller a sort of prequel to *The Great Dictator* (1940) and to a world at war.

TELLING IT BACKWARD, OR SIDEWAYS, OR IN BITS

As to technique, it appears there are two directions in which the intelligent [mystery] novelist is at present trying to develop. . . . He may make

experiments with the telling of his plot, telling backwards, or sideways, or in bits; or he may try to develop character and atmosphere.

Anthony Berkeley Cox, 1930[43]

1930s British detective fiction encouraged writers to cultivate clever narrative gambits. Acutely aware of Dickens's and Collins's experiments in viewpoint and structure, authors were also probably influenced by James, Conrad, and mild modernism.[44] Philip MacDonald's *The Rynox Murder Mystery* (1930) starts with an epilogue, making the whole novel a flashback, and ends with the prologue, the revelation of what really happened. The book's main parts are divided cinematically ("Reel the First," "Sequence the First," and so on). Cameron McCabe's *The Face on the Cutting-Room Floor* (1937) provides multiple solutions to its crimes and includes imaginary reviews of the book we are reading.

We don't associate such playfulness with the laconic tradition of Hammett or the florid Gothics of Rinehart's successors. But suspense writers understood, as Ben Hecht reminds us, that mystery demands duplicitous narration, and its stratagems furnish schemas that can be recast. The 1942 novel *Phantom Lady* presents entire chapters as radiolike collages of competing voices. Kenneth Fearing's *Dagger of the Mind* (1941) and *The Big Clock* (1946) include several first-person narrators, one of them dead. In *Portrait in Smoke* (1950) Bill S. Ballinger alternates a first-person account of an investigator's obsession with a missing woman and a third-person account of her doings in the past. Perversely, the sections of the woman's backstory, chronologically the earliest, are all labeled Part II, while the present-time investigations are called Part I.

Many of these novels, not surprisingly, show the influence of movies. We find brief flashbacks, often set off in italics, along with montage sequences and inner monologues reminiscent of voice-overs. Psychoanalysis and amnesia abound. But some thriller fiction suggests a desire to outdo Hollywood, to take the conventions of suspense and push them further than mass-market filmmaking would permit.

Throughout the 1940s, John Franklin Bardin created discordant novels of poisoned domesticity using fragmentary flash-

backs and flashforwards, dreams and delirium, and changes of identity. Joel Townsley Rogers's *The Red Right Hand* (1945) recounts the feverish puzzle of a serial killer who adopts many disguises. The case is written up by one Dr. Riddle, who shifts without warning between events in the past and things happening at the moment of writing. The possibility, never fully confirmed, is that the action takes place entirely in the mind of the narrator.

In this competition between thriller literature and thriller film, movies were at a disadvantage. Hollywood tradition favored reliable narration; a character might lie, but the movie shouldn't. Thus even films with "lying flashbacks," like *Thru Different Eyes* (1942) and *Crossfire* (1947), will play up the disparities in the accounts so we don't take one version as automatically trustworthy.

There is some wiggle room, though. To enhance mystery, a film might present information in an equivocal manner. *Cry Wolf* (1947) is a woman-in-peril tale that largely restricts its narration to the heroine's ken. A visiting widow comes to believe that the head of the household is tormenting his niece. One scene the heroine isn't present to witness seems to confirm this conclusion, but later we'll learn that this scene, properly construed, fits with the truth that emerges at the end. A more condensed form of this equivocation-in-retrospect launches *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), where the prologue announces, "The fate of the Maltese Falcon remains a mystery to this day." "To this day" might mean "up to the point where our story begins," which could lead us to assume that the falcon's fate will be revealed to us. Actually, the prologue is anticipating the truth: the falcon again eludes its pursuers at the close of the film.

The Maltese Falcon misdirects us in more traditional ways too—positing Archer's wife Iva as a suspect (though she's forgotten fairly early) and including dialogue referring casually to "the man who shot him," implying that the killer isn't a woman. But these red herrings are at least noticeable as we watch. Alternatively, the narration might tease us by flourishing a nearly imperceptible clue. At the start of *The Unsuspected* (1947) a shadowy figure murders a secretary. The camera coasts along the surface of her desk, catching the reflection of the killer's face before cutting away. The face is visible for only thirty-three frames (1.4 seconds)

and is upside down as well, so it's impossible to identify during projection. Only freezing the film would reveal the murderer, but before the video age viewers couldn't do that.

Nearly all the storytelling strategies we've surveyed throughout this book can be used to mystify and mislead. Take ellipsis. Normally if something is left out it's unimportant. No need to show a car trip or all the steps the hero climbs to his apartment if the action doesn't bear on the plot. But often a mystery film will emphasize the ellipsis, either at the moment or retroactively. Concealing what happens in the gap helps create the mystery. But flaunting what we don't know can lead us astray.

In *Fallen Angel* (1945), we see the surly Eric leave his wife June on their wedding night to confront his girlfriend Stella. He explains that he's simply after June's money. Stella spurns him, and he angrily stalks off after her. June's sister, who has trailed Eric to the rendezvous, follows him. Fade out. The next morning June tells a groggy Eric that Stella has been murdered. The previous scene's ending makes both Eric and the sister prime suspects. The sister's involvement becomes even more likely because several of the narration's departures from Eric's viewpoint have concentrated on her watching him.

Little makes us warm up to the antiheroic protagonist of *Fallen Angel*; director Otto Preminger doesn't take us into Eric's mind or present him doing something sympathetic. We come to understand him only after he bitterly tells his life story to June while they're on the run. (The scene is akin to the letter Mark Dixon writes at the climax of *Where the Sidewalk Ends*.) After Eric seems a victim of circumstances, we tend to exonerate him. The sister, by contrast, drops out of the plot. By the time we get the revelation of the real killer—someone who's been vividly introduced but absent from the film for forty minutes—we can recognize the ellipsis on the night of the murder and the marking of two suspects as pieces of prolonged misdirection.

Further along the scale of duplicity is the ellipsis that misleads us more vigorously, by offering vivid but false indications of guilt. The most elaborate instance is the murder that opens *Mildred Pierce*. We aren't shown who shoots down Monte Beragon, but we're encouraged to suspect Mildred. Monte seems to accuse her

with his dying breath before we see someone hurry outside and drive away. The next scene shows Mildred wandering on a pier before she stops and contemplates throwing herself off.

All this suggests that Mildred is the killer. This inference is strengthened when she behaves like a guilty party and confesses to the police. The initial question—Who shot Monte?—is replaced by the investigation-driven question of why Mildred shot him. At the climax, however, a flashback replay of the murder scene reveals that she did not pull the trigger. We can now see that the opening scene bristled with unmarked ellipses concealed by camera movements, sound cues, and continuity cuts. These ellipses are filled in during the climactic replay.[45]

Mildred's opening sequence is a masterpiece of cunning 1940s misdirection, but at least it hints, however fleetingly, at what will prove to be the truth. A second viewing reveals how we were fooled. So does a second viewing of the misleading flight to Cuba in *The Chase* (1946). A much more strenuously "unfair" ellipsis comes in *Secret Beyond the Door* (1948).

Celia Lamphere marries a mysterious architect, and she comes to suspect that he will try to kill her. Her anxieties are made explicit in an opening flashback, restriction to her range of knowledge, and a continually recurring voice-over monologue reporting her thoughts and feelings with unusual explicitness. At the climax, she flees into the foggy night. At the edge of the estate, she turns to see a silhouette approaching. Fade out, and we hear a scream. The frame stays black as the score crescendos and fades out.

Fade up on the husband dressing in his room. For the first time we get *his* internal monologue: "It will be a curious trial. People of the State of New York versus Mark Lamphere, charged with the murder of his wife Celia." He picks up an ornate scarf. "Exhibit A . . ." Soon we get a stylized courtroom scene, with Mark on the stand confessing the killing to a prosecutor who is also himself.[46] When Mark comes out of this fantasy, he goes downstairs to breakfast and a scene with his sister and his secretary. Mark says Celia won't be here. Everything seems to confirm that he has killed her. But in a few minutes Celia enters, unharmed, and ex-

plains that it wasn't Mark but rather her attorney who frightened her in the night.

Secret Beyond the Door was intended as a full-bore psychoanalytic drama. Lang had wanted Celia's stream of consciousness narration to be in a "thought-voice" different from the star Joan Bennett's. The script indicates that Mark's subjective monologue was to be in a similarly detached register. The purpose of the device was to indicate a purely "subconscious" mental process beneath the surface drama. Production disputes, however, led to the voice-overs' being read by the stars themselves. In any event, the introduction of Mark's voice-over is less disruptive than the apparent murder of Celia, cued by the ellipsis and her scream and, most strikingly, by Mark's subjective confession. This shocking breach of point of view, fully indicated in the shooting script, apparently owes nothing to hasty postproduction, as happened with *Laura* and *Desire Me* (1947).[47]

The rest of the film never quite recovers from this flagrant misleading of the viewer. One could imagine an alternative in which Celia's and Mark's inner voices alternate throughout the film. This would have been quite experimental for Hollywood and would have coincided with developments in radio drama and crime fiction of the era, as in the novels of Fearing and Ballinger. But if Celia is to partner with Mark in a more or less happy ending (and not be rescued by another man), then his mental states would need to sustain the duplicity across the film. Every time we heard his subconscious musings, they would need to be ambivalent—overtly suggesting that he is a killer, but in retrospect readable as harmless. This would yield several scenes like the intrusive one we have and might push the genre's system to a breaking point. But you can argue that by so flagrantly violating the norm of restricted viewpoint associated with the woman-in-peril situation, *Secret Beyond the Door* cracks the genre anyway.[48]

With the 1940s thriller we see new niches in Hollywood's narrative ecosystem carved out and occupied with almost frightening speed. Within just a decade, the formats—centering on investigator, bystander, victim, or criminal–were being con-

stantly revised. The man on the run, for instance, was recast as a woman on the run (*Woman in Hiding*, 1949) or a couple on the run (*They Live by Night*, 1949). In the Gothic plots we find not only murderous husbands but also manipulative women targeting spouses, wives, and engaged couples. Switcheroos are everywhere.

Hybrid forms became as common as purer strains. A woman-in-peril plot might shift narrational emphasis to the male rescuer (*Sleep, My Love*; *Too Late for Tears*, 1949; *Whirlpool*, 1950). Inversely, *In a Lonely Place* and *Phantom Lady* pull away from a male protagonist to create a variant of the endangered-woman plot scheme. *So Evil My Love* (1948) embeds a captive-wife situation within a larger dynamic in which an art thief inveigles his lover into stealing the wife's money and eventually poisoning the husband. The element of madness enters when the alcoholic wife comes to believe she is the killer.

No other genre attracted so many top directors: Hitchcock, Lang, Preminger, Chaplin, Wilder, Curtiz, Siodmak, Brahm, Ray, Bernhardt, Kazan, Sirk, Ophüls, Farrow, Minnelli, Cukor, Wyler, and Zinnemann. Some directors, like Anthony Mann and the Lewton protégés Robert Wise and Mark Robson, launched long careers based on the thriller. Even directors thought to be undistinguished, such as Vincent Sherman, H. Bruce Humberstone, Frank Tuttle, Arthur Lubin, and Irving Pichel, proved adept at the new formats.

Writers evidently realized that the emerging genre offered a chance to do something fresh. Actors could take on a broader variety of roles, as did Bogart, de Havilland, Davis, and Crawford. Others, such as George Sanders, Lizabeth Scott, Charles Laughton, and Charles Boyer, proved adept at playing killers, heroes, and roles in between. The genre norms welcomed flamboyant imagery—deep spaces and mazelike sets, looming close-ups and chiaroscuro lighting, long takes and abrupt cuts—that challenged cinematographers, editors, and special effects experts to display their virtuosity.

As if signaling the industry's dependence on popular fiction, mystery writers appeared in films to an extent never seen before. The investigator in *The Mask of Dimitrios* (1944) is a detective

writer, and he's warned, in an ironic aside, "This is not a detective story." *Home Sweet Homicide* (1946), *Blind Spot* (1947), and other films made crime novelists their protagonists, often in comic and satiric mode. The same self-awareness appeared in trade-press coverage. Articles underscored the difference between the emerging thriller and the old whodunit and emphasized the real aim: to take audiences to new dimensions of tension and fright. Throughout the period, stylized imagery, tricky plotting, and narrational subterfuges were justified not as realism, despite offhand appeals to the science of psychoanalysis, but as ways of arousing an audience immersed in Murder Culture.

INTERLUDE

Sturges, or Showing the Puppet Strings

PRESTON STURGES PROUDLY FLAUNTED THE ARTIFICE OF Hollywood filmmaking. Achieving his first success in the Broadway theater, he had little inclination toward documentary realism. His craft bible, Brander Matthews's 1910 *A Study of the Drama*, suggested welcoming every artistic convention as a creative opportunity. Sturges told one reviewer that realism was played out and that "elements of absurdity and fantasy" were essential to cinema.[1] His plots, which build crescendos of pandemonium, pushed 1930s screwball comedy to new levels of stylization.

One measure of his commitment to artifice is his willingness to let characters from one film pop up in another, as when McGinty and the Boss are notified of the miracle at Morgan's Creek. More thoroughgoing, though, are the ways he treats the sound cinema as a merger of the arts. In flagrantly self-conscious ways his films blend long-established stage practices, Hollywood's characteristic conventions, and 1940s sound recording and mixing techniques.

THE MASTERLY STRUCTURE OF TALK

In this synthesis, theater was tops. After some years in Hollywood, Sturges was asked when he was going to write another

play. He replied, "I have never stopped writing plays. This is the theatre."[2] In some regards he joins the 1940s tendency to "theatricalize" cinema by circumscribing time and space. *Christmas in July* (1940) takes place in a single crowded day, and the several apartment scenes of *Unfaithfully Yours* (1948) could be played out in three acts behind a proscenium.

Sturges's theatricality is nowhere more evident than in his fascination with abstract narrative architecture. A novel can meander, Matthews pointed out, but a play needs a "masterly structure" that stands out in relief during the two hours a spectator spends in the auditorium.[3] Matthews's treatise takes as its model the modern play in three acts. Sturges followed this mandate, but he experimented as well. Soon after arriving in Hollywood he devised the intricate plot of *The Power and the Glory* (1933), cross-stitching flashbacks while maintaining an arc of dramatic interest, culminating in the protagonist's suicide.

Of the comedies Sturges directed and wrote, *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* (1944) and *Hail the Conquering Hero* (1944) have the most conventional structure, with the flashback arrangement in the first following the point-of-crisis principle common in the period. But other films experiment with fitting unusual plot patterns into a three-part format. In *The Great McGinty* (1940) we know that the bum we see in the past will wind up as the bartender we see in the present; our curiosity hinges on how he will rise and fall. *Christmas in July* squeezes three major reversals into little more than an hour and dares to leave its protagonists bereft at the close; the happy ending we're privy to will be revealed to them after the curtain drops. *Sullivan's Travels* (1942) traces a cyclical pattern, with Sullivan constantly looping back to civilization despite his best efforts. Then, when he wants to return, he finds he can't.

The Lady Eve (1941) creates a mirror structure. At sea Jean seduces Charles and falls in love with him, but he casts her off. On land and in disguise, she seduces him again, lets him fall in love with her, then casts *him* off. The epilogue, a truncated third act, reunites them on shipboard. *The Palm Beach Story* (1942) presents a teasing prologue that whizzes by so fast that we may not realize the heroine has a twin sister. This becomes the saving twist at

SSPS.1. *The Palm Beach Story* (1942): In what the hero calls "another plot entirely," a mysterious wedding in the prologue . . .

SSPS.2. . . . is eventually explained as involving twins, resulting in a double wedding in the epilogue. The nutty rhyme parodies Hollywood's symmetrical beginnings and endings.

the end, but then we learn, without preparation, that the hero also has a twin (figs. SSPS.1 and SSPS.2).

Sharply articulated structure was one feature of Sturges's theatrical cinema. Then there was the talk. "I spritz dialogue like Seltzer water."[4] When he arrived, rapid-fire comedies like *Footlight Parade* (1933) and *Twentieth Century* (1934) were abandoning the ponderous pace of early talkies. The films Sturges directed marked a new phase in the genre. He naturally incorporated wisecracks and insults, as in the screwball tradition and its stage ancestors. As Brander Matthews puts it in discussing Congreve and Sheridan, "All the characters, even illiterate servants, are endowed with the keen and finished wit of the author."[5] Wit is best expressed in what theatrical tradition calls *répliques*, the short lines that bounce like badminton birds among clever characters.

Sturges reenergized *répliques* in various ways. He picked up the pace drastically; the lines don't bounce, they ricochet. He went on to turn the emerging call-and-response of talkie dialogue into an antiphonal chorus of confusion. Dialogue, Sturges once remarked, "consists of the bright things you would like to have said except that you didn't think of them at the time."[6] Actually, Sturges's people often struggle to say something bright. They quibble, fumble, and grope for words. The plot stands still while the dialogue swirls around trivia: Is the word I want *footpad* or *flatfoot*?

He boasted of having created the technique of "hooking" one line to another through repetitions, but his use of the effect often blocks the snappy forward movement prized in the 1930s. At points where other characters would pause to think, Sturges characters lunge on, pumping out a gush of words. Accordingly, the dialogue hooks are often sheer mimicry, space fillers, and they swell to echo-chamber proportions.

SULLIVAN: These are troublous times!
HADRIAN, THE PRODUCER: What do you know about trouble?
SULLIVAN: What do I know about trouble?
HADRIAN: Yes, what do you know about trouble?
SULLIVAN: What do you mean, what do I know about trouble?
HADRIAN: Just what I'm saying! You want to make a picture about garbage cans. What do you know about garbage cans? When did you eat your last meal out of one?
SULLIVAN, TURNING TO VALDELLE, THE OTHER PRODUCER: Well, what's that got to do with it?
VALDELLE: He's asking *you*!

A few seconds later we get:

HADRIAN: All I'm asking you is: What do you know about hard luck?
VALDELLE: Yes!
SULLIVAN: What do you mean, what do I know about hard luck? Don't you think I've—
HADRIAN: No!
SULLIVAN: What?

These aren't guaranteed laugh lines like those in *His Girl Friday* (1940); they exist largely to fuel the hurtling tempo of the scene. And the tissue of repeated phrases doesn't help characters communicate. Sometimes the constant rant has made everyone deaf.

Matthews's treatise on playwriting had ordained that dialogue must be economical and compact, but Sturges prolongs his speeches by wedging in extra bits. Stammers and stutters are short-term fixes, but when several characters are speaking, into

each fractional beat the script squeezes an interjection, echoic or wildly expansive. Sturges's hooks create baroque swelling, in which each line is made to seem incomplete until it's qualified, amplified, mocked, or negated by the next.

At the end of *Miracle of Morgan's Creek*, the newspaper editor is phoning Governor McGinty to identify the father of the sextuplets. As the all-powerful political boss chimes in, he and the governor are already starting to cover up the scandalous side of the incident. The entire exchange, for some reason taken down by a secretary in the background, runs a mere twenty-six seconds.

MCGINTY: You mean he's still in jail, you dumb blockhead?
EDITOR: Yes!
MCGINTY: Well, get him out!
EDITOR: But how can I, Mr. Governor, with all those charges against him?
MCGINTY: By dropping the charges, you dumb cluck!
THE BOSS: You weal head!
MCGINTY: Get me that banker on the phone!
THE BOSS: His charter is cancelled.
MCGINTY: And that Justice of the Peace!
THE BOSS: His license is revoked and his motel is condemned.
MCGINTY: And that Sheriff!
THE BOSS: He's retired! He's too old!
EDITOR: Do you want the M.P.'s and the U.S. Men?
MCGINTY: What have they got to do with it? That was a State Guard Uniform!
THE BOSS: I can see it from here.
MCGINTY: As a matter of fact he's a Colonel in it. I'm bringing him his commission tomorrow.
THE BOSS: Retroactive as of last year.

At the limit, even syllables can be pulverized, as in the famous *Morgan's Creek* scene in which Trudy Kockenlocker and Norval Jones help a justice of the peace spell the name Ignatz Ratzkiwatski.

Sometimes the onrush of thought can't be split into fragments of conversation; it demands monologue. Sturges obliges with the

most oratorical cinema of the forties. He freely incorporates theatrical tirades. His characters may expatiate at any moment, turning a simple idea into an extemporaneous disquisition on a girl's duty to departing soldiers, a son's responsibility to his mother, or an artist's need to come to grips with social injustice. Appositional phrases pile up, self-interruptions abound, and the monologues that result have the same sense of endless revision that the *répliques* generate. Sometimes the purpose is rhetorical, aiming to con a sucker, but sometimes it's purely expressive, nearly a soliloquy. When Sullivan, Libby the girlfriend in *Hail the Conquering Hero*, and other Sturges naïfs speak their mind, they are baring their souls—inevitably, at length.

PLACING THE HISTORY OF MOVIES

All of this may seem to make Sturges drastically "uncinematic" in a decade that prized brilliant visuals. Yet that impression is wrong. For one thing, his apparently unassertive long takes are staged with considerable subtlety. Just as important is his very 1940s pleasure in filmic self-consciousness.

He had already parodied melodrama in his Lubitschian screenplay for *The Good Fairy* (1935), which included an overwrought film within the film. In his forties works, ordinary folks make reference to pratfalls and show business; in *Christmas in July*, when Jimmy's girl knocks over a flowerpot, he says "Wait for your laugh." Sturges satirizes montage sequences, publicity, and movie exhibition. The Regent Theater in Morgan's Creek boasts mock Paramount posters and a fairly implausible triple feature tricked out with shorts and a movie quiz. When Norval objects to sitting through all those movies alone, Trudy replies, "Couldn't you just sleep through some of 'em?"[7] At the close of the same film, Sturges tosses off a punning firecracker: The unseen father, Ratzkiwatski, is said to be "out of the picture," and the Boss interjects, "He was never in it."

Sturges's most famous foray into cinematic self-consciousness is *Sullivan's Travels*. Unlike the sheer burlesque of *Hellzapoppin'* (1941) and *Crazy House* (1943) and the kidding of stars in films

like *It's a Great Feeling* (1949), Sturges's film goes beyond one-off references to famous names (Lubitsch, Capra) and launches an inquiry into how movies seize audiences.

We witness three screenings. The first film-within-a-film comes in Sullivan's would-be drama, a tense scene of tramps fist-fighting atop a boxcar before they plunge into the river. This, the abrupt ending to the fictional movie and an equally abrupt opening to ours, reveals Sturges as a fine *pasticheur*. Once Sullivan takes to the road, he visits a local theater with a widow and her sister, and though we don't see the movie that's projected, the sobriety of the drama seems to be the main reason the audience fidgets, whistles, and rustles candy wrappers. The third screening shows an actual movie, the 1934 Disney short *Playful Pluto*, in which Mickey's faithful dog is tangled in flypaper. In the black congregation's church, men from the chain gang burst into grateful laughter, and this convinces Sullivan that escapist entertainment (even without a little sex) serves a social purpose.

Critics have seen this climax as a piece of bad faith, but it stands as a typical, if extreme, instance of a 1940s willingness to situate the filmmaker and his work in a wider tradition—not only the social comment films of the 1930s but also the silent cinema. Sullivan disparages Westerns, the Keystone Kops, and Sennett bathing beauties, an early hint that his quest for Significance snobbishly ignores these forerunners of Mickey and Pluto. Elsewhere Sturges's 1940s films can hark back to his "narratage" technique of *The Power and the Glory*. Jean in *The Lady Eve* uses her hand mirror to watch women approach Charles, and she voices their dialogue in sync with them. Later she predicts what she and Charles will do and say in the forest, and her voice-over lingers as a narrator's commentary when she springs her romantic trap.

Near the end of the 1930s, intellectuals were starting to realize that movies had a history. Among directors Sturges stands out for his frank regard for what came before him. He helped René Clair, then venerated as a European master, by producing *I Married a Witch* (1942), and he tried to get D. W. Griffith to launch a new film. Sturges's own films are salted with silent-film touches. Scenes are played out in frantic pantomime, chases and montages are slightly undercranked to create archaic fast motion,

tender moments are undermined by clichéd extracts from classical music, and dialogues are punctuated by painful slapstick. Sturges paid ambivalent homage to Hollywood history with *The Sin of Harold Diddlebock* (1947; aka *Mad Wednesday*). In an audacious film within the film, he reruns the climactic football game in Harold Lloyd's *The Freshman* (1925). "A pratfall," he stated as a rule, "is better than anything."[8]

Yet critics deplored Sturges's love of physical comedy. The wild soaring of his dialogue, they felt, was shot to earth by clumsy slapstick. The detractors didn't, it seems to me, take account of Sturges's efforts to sculpt noises and music as carefully as speech.

In *The Palm Beach Story*, Gerry again and again clambers into an upper berth, and every time that she steps on the face of John D. Hackensacker, we hear his pince-nez delicately crushed to shards. When Trudy Kockenlocker reenacts her night out by lunging into a momentary dance, a brief sonic flashback supplies some music. *The Great Moment* (1944) is dominated by the soft breathing of patients under ether. *Christmas in July* offers bountiful instances of discreet sound-effects comedy. Rubber-tipped arrows fired at a man's neck yield two different-sounding porps, once when they smack him and once when he yanks them off. As people around the city listen to a radio broadcast, the texture of the announcer's voice changes from shot to shot, with each radio set yielding a different hum, distortion, and timbre. And Sturges was no less careful about his mixes. In *The Lady Eve*, when Charles stumbles out of the frame, we hear not only his thump but a metallic crash and smashed crockery. The sound hints at what we see next, Charles sprawled atop a waiter we hadn't known was offscreen.

NOTHING HAD HAPPENED

Unfaithfully Yours encapsulates Sturges's solutions to the problems of blending theater, moving images, and sound within a carefully etched plot scheme. An orchestra conductor suspects his wife of cheating on him with his secretary, Tony. During a concert, as he conducts each piece, the maestro imagines a different way of dealing with the adulterous couple. At a period when heroes were tormented by dreams and hallucinations they couldn't

control, Sturges gives us fantasies elaborately designed by a control freak.

In this, his longest film, Sturges creates an admirably modular construction, timed like a Broadway play to make its acts increasingly brief. For the first forty-five minutes, we follow Sir Alfred de Carter as he comes to doubt Daphne's fidelity. Then the concert, with its three central fantasy scenes, consumes thirty minutes. Our third act, which runs about twenty-five minutes, consists largely of Alfred returning to the apartment planning to implement his first and most elaborate fantasy: murdering Daphne and framing Tony for it. But things don't go as neatly as he had imagined. Alfred's finesse on the podium doesn't carry over to encounters with lamps, three-legged tables, wickerwork chairs, a straight razor, and the Simplicitas disc recorder. After Daphne returns to the wrecked apartment, Alfred learns she has been faithful all along.

At the film's start Sturges characterizes Alfred as sensibly trusting. He refuses time and again to read the report on Daphne's behavior commissioned by his brother-in-law. It's only at the half-hour point, when the detective assigned to trail Daphne blurts out circumstantial evidence of an assignation, that Alfred begins to entertain the possibility of her betrayal. Throughout these scenes, which restrict us to his range of knowledge, Sturges has recourse to the familiar 1940s strategy of suppressive narration in order to generate a mystery. Once Alfred sees Daphne and Tony chatting at lunch, confirmation bias takes hold of him—but not us, since we also see him as irrationally angry and morose.

This entire first part could have been much briefer, but Sturges deliberately padded it out.[9] By making Alfred initially reluctant to doubt Daphne, the plot prolongs our curiosity and allows us to believe that in the last act he could regret his suspicions.

The central concert is a tour de force of construction. Each of Alfred's fantasies, which Sturges calls "prospects" to distinguish them from "retrospects" (a 1940s term for flashbacks), is introduced by a long tracking shot into his eye as he conducts the piece.[10] This is an ingenious variant on the flashback framing devices common in the era. The concert program consists of

three pieces, each keyed to Alfred's changing mood. In a burst of directorial virtuosity, each piece is heard in toto during its corresponding fantasy and is often tightly synchronized to the onscreen action.

The first piece is Rossini's overture to *Semiramide*, an opera about a beautiful queen who dies when caught in a rivalry between two men. The music alternates between light, pulsating strings suitable for comic suspense and more dramatic passages, as when Alfred slits Daphne's throat with his razor. In the second prospect sequence, Alfred forgives Daphne to the reconciliation melody from Wagner's *Tännhauser*. In the third, Alfred proposes to Tony a game of Russian roulette, accompanied by Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini*, another rendition of adulterous passions (and composed by a Russian at that). Throughout, Sturges mounts a daring experiment with time, since the music presents an ongoing present (the concert performance that we don't see) while the image and dialogue give us a hypothetical future.

The finale has aroused the most critical controversy. As if Alfred's fantasies have strengthened his desire to be rid of Daphne, he flees to their apartment at the close of the performance and makes preparations to fulfill his first, homicidal plan. In a sly nod to the narrative evasions of Murder Culture plotting, Sturges's initial "prospect" had shrewdly left out some detective story details of this scheme. We know simply that in Alfred's fantasy the murder somehow depended on a phonograph recording of Daphne's voice. (It could be a reference to the gimmick in S. S. Van Dine's *The Canary Murder Case*, filmed in 1929 and by 1948 a pretty hoary wheeze.) Alfred imagines luring Tony to the crime scene and then planting the razor there, complete with incriminating fingerprints.

Once Alfred starts, however, we see the damnable refusal of things to cooperate. He can't find the recording machine; when he does, he can't make it work. Preparing the razor, he cuts his thumb. Then, deciding to enact the fantasy of forgiveness, he botches writing the farewell check. And proposing a bout of Russian roulette, he gets his pistol tangled in a phone cord. He can't find any bullets anyway.

The entire scene recapitulates the fantasies of the second part in the register of slapstick. Some critics have deplored the dozen minutes of pratfalls and mayhem Sturges deploys here. But he has made the sequence a comic counterpart to the concert section by his carefully worked sound track. Now we hear a score closer to the stylings of Carl Stalling or *Playful Pluto* than a concert hall classic. Alfred's fumblings are accompanied by vaudeville sound effects and a Mickey Mouse score that turn him into a cartoon character. Fragments of the concert pieces recur, played with dissonance and distortion. Within this hallucinatory sendup of art music, outrageous sound effects flash out: the squinch of Alfred trying to squeeze into small gloves, the twang of a razor strop, Alfred's explosive sneezes, and the usual Sturges cacophony of crashes, composed of many different sounds and emitted at a volume suggestive of controlled demolition.

The sound gags around the Simplicitas recording gadget are remarkably aggressive, most notably when the microphone misbehaves and sends out nerve-shattering feedback. We learn that Alfred's murder scheme involves recording himself at 33⅓ rpm calling for help and then playing that back at 78 rpm, which would mimic a woman's high-pitched cries. But of course he mistakenly records himself at the faster rate, so the playback makes his words intolerably lugubrious.

Since long-playing records had only recently been introduced to the consumer market, the premise may have been ahead of Sturges's audience, but it registers as a classic gag on distorted sound. The play with recording speeds recalls a similar moment in *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* when Trudy in a record shop lip-synchs to a bassist singing "Asleep in the Deep." But in *Unfaithfully Yours* the joke is absorbed into a broader dynamic: an ingenious, wide-ranging sonic texture that manages to be at once amusing and virtuosic.

We have, then, a sort of comedic *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, in which the central action takes place in the protagonist's mind. Sturges seems to have regretted this, noting in his memoirs that audiences felt unsatisfied. "*Nothing* had happened. He hadn't killed *her*; he hadn't killed himself. It just looked that way."[11] Even

if one doesn't find the film funny (I do), you have to admire the architecture and the filigree, a unique theme-and-variations played out with a casual effrontery. *Unfaithfully Yours* fulfills Sturges's faith in what "absurdity and fantasy" could do, while epitomizing the freely stylized storytelling we find throughout his era.

CHAPTER 11

Artifice in Excelsis

The primary point about the "show-off" is that his effort is in a sense its own reward, and depends only relatively upon the result observed, in the spectator, or any other "objective" criterion. The psychology of show-offism is independent self-consciousness: a trying-out of powers for their own benefit: a narcissism of energy. And here is the most subtle part of Hollywood dynamics: the implicit but necessary role of the narcissistic movies is to let as many people as possible "in on" its narcissism.

Parker Tyler[1]

BING CROSBY AND BOB HOPE, EVER BOUND FOR SOMEWHERE else, created the top-grossing series of the era. Six features, from *The Road to Singapore* (1940) to *The Road to Bali* (1952), solidified Crosby's popularity and made Hope a major star.[2] The series parodied tales of exotic adventures while sprinkling in songs, chases, bumbling swindles, and the interplay of Hope's aggressive cowardice with Crosby's monumental nonchalance. In the course of these farces, the pair relentlessly insisted that a movie was just a movie.

What scholars would eventually call citation, reflexivity, and breaking the fourth wall became a *Road to . . .* trademark. In *The Road to Utopia* (1945), Hope points across the Alaskan wastes to the Paramount peak and declares it their bread and butter. Some-

11.1. *Variety Girl* (1947): Bob Hope's dartboard swivels to reveal his favorite target.

times the boys complain about the script ("They could find other ways to get us here"), and once they boast that they'll escape danger because there are five years left on their contracts. At the start of *The Road to Bali*, a map of Australia is dotted with road signs advertising their previous pictures.

There are incessant references to stars and other movies ("We're off to see the Lizard"). When the pals are mobbed by women, Bob attributes the offscreen shriek to a jealous Errol Flynn. At one point in *The Road to Bali*, footage from *The African Queen* is inserted before Bob rescues Bogart's Oscar and tries to keep it for himself. After all, he says resentfully, Crosby has one.

As the scenes unroll, the gags remind us of the screening situation. Kissing Dorothy Lamour, Bob sighs, "As far as I'm concerned, this picture is over now." When Hope recaps the plot for the benefit of people who came late, Crosby complains that they missed his big song. On another trip, Hope learns there will be no topless women where they're going and turns to the camera: "Stick around, folks. He could be wrong, you know." To a chortling gorilla, Bob says, "Go sit in the audience if you're gonna laugh like that."

Hope made self-referential gags a signature of his solo outings as well. In *The Princess and the Pirate* (1944), Crosby appears in a cameo and Hope protests, "This is the last picture I do for Goldwyn." Needling appearances by Bing were de rigueur in Hope movies, but Bob occasionally got his own back (fig. 11.1). Hope could mock himself as well; turning off a radio blaring his Pepsodent commercial, he says, "I can't stand that guy." Again we get

frequent looks toward the camera and asides to the audience. In *Son of Paleface* (1952), the sound drops out during a naughty scene and Bob confides in us: "You should've heard that line." One of the funniest moments in these films is played more quietly. Bob muses, "I wonder if this ever happens in real life."

ARTIFICE MEETS ARTINESS

Of course comedy is a highly stylized genre. Reflexivity was a standard feature of vaudeville and wasn't unknown in either the silent film or the 1930s. Bugs Bunny and other cartoon characters shamelessly address the viewer. Yet Hope and Hope-Crosby pursued these effects with a zeal that was characteristic of a broader tendency in 1940s narrative. At that period Hollywood reveled in self-conscious narration to a degree unprecedented in sound cinema—an acknowledgment that many pleasures of cinematic storytelling rest on artifice.

This embrace of artifice is seen most explicitly in cockeyed quips about Hollywood. We've seen that *Week-End at the Waldorf* (1945) cites other MGM films, including its source, *Grand Hotel* (1932). Paramount could use reflexivity as a branding device as well. In *Murder, He Says* (1945) a doltish pollster looking for hidden money is guided by a scene in "that Bob Hope picture *Ghost Breakers*." When he fails, the woman with him asks, "What other movies have you seen?" It's one thing for a maniacal, stitch-faced murderer in *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944) to be constantly mistaken for the monster in *Frankenstein* (1931). (The drunken plastic surgeon who mangled him had just seen the movie.) It's a bit more outrageous when the drama critic Mortimer Brewster, portrayed with whinnying hamminess by Cary Grant, tells the mumbling Dr. Einstein to "stop underplaying."

Things can get more esoteric. At one point in *Hellzapoppin'*, a character is striding through a studio set and passes an igloo. Hanging outside is a sled bearing the word "Rosebud." He remarks, "I thought they burnt that." Topical gags based on film references were nothing new; 1930s comedies and dramas often mention particular movies. But this reference is more oblique than most. It's meaningless to those who haven't seen, or at least

11.2. *Singin' in the Rain* (1952): Our film within the film.

11.3. *Jolson Sings Again* (1949): Al, played by Larry Parks, meets Larry Parks and notes the resemblance.

heard about, *Citizen Kane*, and the gag amounts to what we'd today call a spoiler.[3]

Musicals exploit self-referential stylization too, as when Gene Kelly dances with MGM's Jerry the Mouse in *Anchors Aweigh* (1945) or when a couple of dude-ranch cowboys in *Two Guys from Texas* (1948) sing, "I Want to Be a Cowboy in the Movies." The last shot of *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) presents us with a billboard for the film we've just seen (fig. 11.2).

The biopic *Jolson Sings Again* (1949) picks up the singer's story after the end of *The Jolson Story* (1946). The sequel's plot shows the production of the previous film, so we're treated to recording sessions that reveal, more or less, how the playback track was created. In the earlier movie, Al Jolson himself sang and the actor Larry Parks lip-synched. Now Parks as Al creates playback of that movie. On *our* sound track, of course, we still hear Jolson himself, lip-synched by Parks. In the strangest scene, the elder Al (again played by Parks) meets the young actor who'll play him in the movie—Parks, of course (fig. 11.3). Since *The Jolson Story* was one of the most widely seen hits of the era, audiences would have recognized this as a piece of enjoyable showing off. "The possibilities conjured up by this double hallucination are infinite," wrote one critic, "especially if the rest of Hollywood gloms onto the general idea."[4]

Recognition of the sheer conventionality of cinematic storytelling shows up in more serious, even somber, contexts. Some

strategies we've charted mark themselves as self-consciously artificial. Voice-over narrators enter into dialogue with the characters (*The Magnificent Ambersons*, 1942) or ventriloquize for them (*The Gay Sisters*, 1942). Direct address to the camera needn't always be humorous, as the opening of *Edward, My Son* (1949) shows. At the end of *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), Norma Desmond, more than ready for her close-up, leers and claws at "those wonderful people out there in the dark."

More commonly, we've seen that passages motivated as giving us access to characters' minds or as summarizing a long process can devolve into montage sequences that become exercises in audiovisual virtuosity. These, along with flashy camera movements and complex chiaroscuro compositions, come off as unmistakably show-offish. What Parker Tyler called Hollywood's "narcissism of energy" can be taken as another hallmark of 1940s narrative ambitions.

Perhaps the most concrete reminder of Hollywood's pledge to artifice is the painted portrait. Portraits are everywhere in cinema of the 1940s. Art historian Steven Jacobs has pointed out that they can show up in any genre but are prominent in melodramas and crime dramas. As ancestral images, they may tower over the characters, terrorizing women and triggering men's desire. In their immobility, they remind the living of death.[5] At once realistic and stylized, they can come to seem surrogates for cinema, but a rapt, frozen cinema very different from the delirious pace of montages. Commanding the attention of characters and the camera, they serve as constant reminders of the uncanny powers of pictorial representation.

One filmmaker single-mindedly pursued the implications of cine-portraiture. Albert Lewin aspired to be a poet, wrote film criticism, nearly finished a PhD in literature, and taught college before coming to Hollywood. He worked as a producer during the 1930s and turned to directing his own work under the aegis of his own company. He contracted Richard Neutra to design his home and socialized with Man Ray and Max Ernst. Not surprisingly, his films are ripe with the aestheticized sensibility of late Romanticism, mixed with Surrealism-in-exile. You have to be something

of a *précieux* to declare medieval French "as tender and golden as infantile excrement."[6]

The Moon and Sixpence (1942) is a study of the artist as cad. The protagonist gives up wife and family to paint. He holds a terrible fascination for women and lesser artists, whom he exploits out of sheer single-mindedness. The antihero of *The Private Affairs of Bel Ami* (1946) is a social-climbing Lothario who runs through five women, deftly turning them against one another. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945), the caddishness is contagious: it passes from the idling Lord Henry Wotton to Dorian, who proceeds to corrupt their social circle. The heroine of *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* (1951) is a female cad. Capricious and selfish, she coolly allows one of her suitors to commit suicide before her eyes. Yet—and some would see this as Lewin capitulating to Hollywood morality—each of his scoundrels is redeemed, rejecting self-absorption and recognizing the need for pure love.

Choosing libertine protagonists gave Lewin considerable formal opportunities. He could draw on the literary traditions he loved; he could situate his plots in high-class milieus; he could create suspense as each woman succumbed to the hero's seductive ways. He could also recast 1940s storytelling devices to suit his taste. *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* is recollected by an expert in antiquities, who employs a strange soliloquizing manner of speech, half-addressed to the audience. His account is interrupted by a flashback recounted by the Dutchman himself. *The Moon and Sixpence* calls to mind *Citizen Kane*, released the year before. We never encounter the painter Strickland outside someone's narration, and the whole is doubly framed. In a soliloquy, the art critic Wolfe recounts the overarching tale, sometimes addressing the camera. His encounters with people who knew Strickland provide further flashbacks. Several scenes are played silent, with the voice-over recapping the conversations. And we are prevented from seeing Strickland's paintings until the final scene—just before they are destroyed.

The Private Affairs of Bel Ami lacks these Conradian refracting lenses, but it attains formal symmetry through strict parallels and rarefied motifs. Duroy's lovers-to-be are neatly introduced at a

party in the beginning, and later scenes line up as repetitions of his earlier exploits. Although he is no artist, he thrives in salons. He seduces one woman by composing a tune for her daughter, and he captures a wife who is sunk in morbid contemplation of a landscape picture (anachronistically, by Max Ernst) portraying the temptation of Saint Anthony. Duroy is surrounded by images of Punch, tireless woman-beater; he will die in a duel staged near a puppet booth. Lewin often embeds within his shots images recalling earlier scenes, as when a caricature of Bel Ami as Punch sits in the foreground of a scene in which he slaps his most devoted mistress.

One effect of all these devices is to hold a protagonist at arm's length. We get little direct access to the psyche of Strickland or Duroy; we learn their motives and aims only when they confide them to others. All our sympathy goes to the victims. This detached handling of the cad is intensified by the milieu, which teems with allusions to the fine arts. Quotations from Omar Khayyam and Matthew Arnold, a replica of Michelangelo's *David*, a Liszt prelude: all become motifs that reinforce the Byronic, slightly decadent romanticism of the plots. Erich von Stroheim, the director fond of staging seduction scenes under crucifixes, was one of Lewin's idols: "He liked symbols very much, and so do I."[7] The artificiality is underscored in the black-and-white films by Lewin's signature gesture: the startling intrusion of color. These moments include a shift to sepia for the Tahiti episodes of *The Moon and Sixpence* and to full-color, single-shot inserts of the paintings that haunt his characters.[8]

The Picture of Dorian Gray dramatizes the unearthly power of portraiture. The plot commingles two precepts: the ancient belief that the image captures the soul, and Wilde's epigram that life imitates art. Seeing the splendid portrait Basil Hallward has rendered, Dorian childishly wishes he could always look so young. Soon, under the sway of Oscar Wilde's verse and the advice of the voluptuary Lord Wotton, he seduces and abandons the cabaret singer Sybil. Only then does the portrait start to change—not merely aging, but sinking into wrinkled putrefaction. (The image was provided by Ivan Albright in his rotten-fruit style.) Eventually Dorian will drive Sybil to suicide and will murder Hallward.

Compared with other films of the period, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* remains a remarkable effort to create a closed chamber of echoes and counterpoints. To the cynical, narcissistic Lord Wotton the film contrasts the painter Hallward, who urges Dorian to embrace Buddhism's loss of self. The film is saturated with references to the arts. Dorian's mansion is a private museum of painting and sculpture; on his tables sit stereopticon slides and books of verse; his childhood playroom includes a toy theater that resembles the Two Turtles cabaret he frequents; and there's music both high (Liszt) and low (the ditty "Little Yellow Bird"). Sybil keeps a picture of Sir Tristan over her dressing table, and Dorian's youngest conquest can be glimpsed reading a book about Tristan, but neither woman will become Dorian's Isolde. Instead, a toy knight in Dorian's playroom faces off against the degrading portrait, two images of Dorian's nature. His fate if he's caught is anticipated by framings that show his head already in a noose.

Lacquered by an external voice-over narration that knows Dorian's every thought, the film strives for the fastidious self-sufficiency of a Fabergé egg. Lewin's hermetism anticipates the themes of modern film theory, from the power of the gaze (Dorian passes the shop of optometrist Dr. Look) to the ambiguities of gender (Dorian is blankly androgynous).[9] There are even what a later generation would call Easter eggs. Each scene returning to Dorian's childhood playroom shows alphabet blocks rearranged in a new pattern and bearing the initials of his victims and allies. The array of blocks includes a pairing of A and L, for Albert Lewin (figs. 11.4 to 11.6).[10] Call it highbrow or middlebrow, in the 1940s an Ivy League bookworm could slip in a recondite joke.

ARTIFICE IN THE ATTIC

The trend toward self-conscious artifice went beyond mentions of other films or rival artistic traditions. It incorporated an attitude toward film history and American cinema as an institution. Consider three instances, all from 1941.

In *One Foot in Heaven*, a minister who deplores the newfangled moving pictures attends a screening of William S. Hart's *The*

11.4. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945): In the climactic scene, Dorian attacks the portrait.

11.5. The alphabet blocks on the floor provide the initials of the major characters (SV for Sybil Vane, BH for Basil Howard, AC for Allen Campbell, et al.) Apart from them sit the blocks bearing AL, designating director Albert Lewin.

11.6. The positioning of the AL blocks recalls the placement of the artist Basil's signature on the portrait. The child Gladys adds her initial, as if anticipating the game the blocks will play out later.

Silent Man (1917). He's surprised to find it irreproachable: "It had a good moral." Dramatized visits to cinemas go back at least as far as *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (1902) and *The Story the Biograph Told* (1904). But the scene in *One Foot in Heaven* not only includes footage of a film released twenty-five years earlier, it serves as a kind of justification for Hollywood by persuading our upright protagonist that movies aren't spawn of Satan.

At the close of *Strawberry Blonde*, we in the audience are invited to join in singing the title song, prompted by the sort of magic lantern slides typical of nickelodeon shows. Yet the characters aren't shown visiting a movie at any point. The audience is expected to understand that in the period before the Great War, a tune like that was a staple of movie-house entertainment. As in the silent-film pastiche opening *Kitty Foyle* (1940), old movies serve as an emblem of an era.

Glamour Boy centers on a former child star, played by former child star Jackie Cooper. He is hired by Marathon Studios to help

with a remake of *Skippy* (1931), which Cooper starred in. At one point, when the studio screens clips of the original, we are shown Cooper watching himself as a boy. We're invited to see him as a part, however minor, of film history.

These and many other films point to a newly emerging sense of what a movie was. Filmmakers began to treat cinema as a medium with a history that should be acknowledged, and to some extent respected. While intellectuals debated the cultural effects of motion pictures, Hollywood proposed its own reading of its traditions and achievements.

There are, for example, movies inside movies. Films have long included moviegoing in their plots. Even a minor regional film like *Wheat and Tares* (1915) uses a trip to the cinema to provide a dramatic twist.[11] Something similar happens in *Across the Pacific* (1942), which features a chase inside a Panama movie house, where a Japanese film is projected accompanied by a *benshi*, the traditional narrator. But several 1940s films invest moviegoing with social significance. A trip to the show can be a mark of innocent romance, as at the start of *Tom, Dick, and Harry* (1941). In *The Human Comedy* (1943), three lonely GIs salvage an evening when two young women pick them up and go to the pictures. The scene is utterly unsalacious; the small-town theater is an innocent diversion and a sanctuary from the war. The protodelinquents of *Youth Runs Wild* (1944), however, don't understand the theater as refuge and become bored and rowdy in a back row.

"I like the movies," says Henry Morgan as the hero of *So This Is New York* (1948) while we watch him in a picture-show audience. There commences a flashback in which he narrates footage from World War I. The scene might serve as a symbol of the era's film-consciousness, and particularly its fascination with silent movies. A more sinister counterpart appears in *The Spiral Staircase* (1945), which opens with its protagonist watching a silent movie screened in a hotel. Billed as *The Kiss*, it's actually *Sands of Dee* (1912), and its climax, the death of an innocent girl, casts a shadow over the drama to come, which focuses on a mute woman in peril on a stormy night.

Certain aspects of filmgoing get milked for humor. A long sequence of Fred Allen's *It's in the Bag* (1944) deals with the frus-

tration of trying to find a seat in a jammed picture palace. (Now playing: *Zombies in the Attic*.) *Practically Yours* (1944) centers on combat footage that seems to show Dan Bellamy, a naval pilot, suicidally crashing into a Japanese aircraft carrier. The footage is scrutinized by newsreel editors, who find that the plane and the pilot survived. Welcomed home in triumph, Bellamy is forced into a massive publicity campaign that includes an enforced visit to a screening of a film celebrating his bravery. Throughout the show, his snide comments make the viewers think this jerk in the dark is mocking a war hero. *Practically Yours* satirizes the deployment of warriors for propaganda while suggesting that the public will swallow whatever the movie screen shows.

Another long-standing tradition takes us behind the scenes in production, more or less fictitiously. Again the precedents are many, from Chaplin's *His New Job* (1915) to *Show People* (1928), *What Price Hollywood?* (1932), *A Star Is Born* (1937), *Stand-In* (1937), *It Happened in Hollywood* (1937), and *Boy Meets Girl* (1938). The tradition of spoofing studio policies continues in 1940s efforts like *World Premiere* (1941) and the opening passages of *Once More, My Darling* (1949).

Parker Tyler's charge that the industry was deeply—or, rather, shallowly—narcissistic is borne out by still other behind-the-scenes films. *Star Dust* (1940) purports to warn the ambitious young who come to Hollywood that it's a tough business, so it starts with some failed performers headed home. But soon Linda Darnell, John Payne, and Mary Healy take the town by storm. Their rise, subject to some studio rivalry and intrigue, is dotted with casual references to Dietrich, Laughton, Lombard, and even Andy Devine. The studio, obviously an analogue to 20th Century–Fox, is decorated with pictures of its contract players, from Henry Fonda to Don Ameche. The newcomers visit Grauman's Chinese Theatre, where they try fitting their feet into the footprints left by Mary Pickford, Clark Gable, Harold Lloyd, Shirley Temple, and, again, Don Ameche. In the epilogue Darnell is creating her own footprint while the real Sid Grauman beams.

Star Dust functions as both a launch for Darnell and Payne in their first picture and a sustained exercise in studio branding. Something similar goes on in Fox's B item *Take It or Leave*

11.7. Based on a popular name-that-tune radio show, *Take It or Leave It* (1944) asks contestants to identify films based on clips. In an exercise in product placement, all the extracts come from Fox releases.

It (1944) (fig. 11.7). Even these films aren't quite as "reflexive," we'd now say, as *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break* (1942). Here W. C. Fields offers a scenario to a studio head, and our film enacts the film he proposes. The less farcical *Hold Back the Dawn* (1941) begins with an illegal immigrant trying to sell his story to Paramount. It ends with the voice of Mitchell Leisen, the director of our film and the film within the film, explaining the "real life" outcome of the action.

These behind-the-scenes movies maintained the studio's brand while also kidding the stars' public images. In *Star-Spangled Rhythm* (1943), Betty Hutton, a Paramount secretary, tries to help Eddie Bracken impress his pals, and she pulls in virtually all the big names on the lot, from DeMille and Sturges to Hope and Crosby. In the guise of boosting a charity, Paramount promotes itself again with *Variety Girl* (1947), featuring a host of director and star walk-ons, including the inevitable Bob and Bing. *It's a Great Feeling* (1949) pivots around Jack Carson's effort to make a movie starring himself, and it includes scenes of Raoul Walsh, King Vidor, and other directors refusing to work with him. A more pointed satire informs Ben Hecht's *Actors and Sin* (1951), which consists of two tales of life in theater and the movies. In the second, a nine-year-old girl writes a blockbuster screenplay called *Woman of Sin*. How is that possible? Her agent explains, "She's not a young nine."

The prototypes of metamaking of movies are provided by the comedians Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson. Their *Crazy House* (1943) travesties the behind-the-scenes story by showing how the

pair, failing to persuade Universal to produce their film, go independent thanks to the backing of the man who purportedly holds the patent for talking pictures. Cartoonish sight gags, dumb puns ("Wanna buy an anchor? Just off the boat!"), and musical numbers are patched together into an extravaganza that Universal winds up buying after all.

Crazy House can't match the pandemonium of its forerunner *Hellzapoppin'*. On Broadway the long-running farce was revised from night to night and demanded audience participation, so it couldn't be replicated on film. Accordingly, Olsen and Johnson and their screenwriters erect a hall of movie mirrors.

A boy-girl romance is viewed through a sort of television on a sound stage, with the protagonists commenting, *Mystery Science Theater* style, on what they see before they are transported into the story.[12] From time to time the action shifts to the projection booth that's supposedly showing the film we're watching. Accordingly we get gags with out-of-sync sound, misframed images, and footage snagged in the gate. At one point a boy leaves the theater and, as in a Tex Avery animation, his silhouette moves across our frame, watched by the onscreen actors before they resume a song. At another moment, Universal gets to display the special-effects wizardry employed on their *Invisible Man* series: Chic's top half and Ole's bottom half separate, quarrel, and eventually merge into a single torso. The material aspects of cinema are subjected to a comic version of Dziga Vertov's formal play in *Man with a Movie Camera*—something we don't find in most earlier US movies about moviemaking.

For decades authentic footage had been inserted into Hollywood fictions, especially during montage sequences. Wartime combat films and the semidocumentary cycle incorporated actuality footage more or less unobtrusively. But just as often, surveillance or newsreel shots would be marked off as distinct from the main story. Characters might be screening material that would inform the plot, such as aerial combat in *Bombardier* (1943) and the Nuremberg Trials in *Sealed Verdict* (1948). In *Walk a Crooked Mile* (1948), as in *Practically Yours*, footage shot and shown earlier is scrutinized for clues missed on the first pass.

In all these cases, whatever realism cinema can claim is ab-

sorbed into a larger, sometimes weirder, fiction. *Let's Live a Little* (1948) opens with a Hawaiian travelogue that is interrupted, *Kane* fashion, by complaints in the projection room. The pastiche newsreel that studio executives watch at the start of *Without Reservations* (1946) includes some genuine footage but mostly exists as a comic setup of the complications to come.

Dillinger (1945) subordinates fact to fiction in an unusual way. It starts in a movie house screening a crime newsreel. After "The End" appears and the lights come up, an emaciated old-timer steps on the stage to protest that this portrayal of his son John wasn't fair at all. He initiates a new story, the bulk of the film that we're to see, in which Dillinger is treated somewhat more sympathetically. We never return to the opening movie house frame, so we're tempted to take that prologue as merely a B picture's attention-grabbing novelty. Yet in a way the climax balances the framing situation. Dillinger is shot down outside Chicago's Biograph Theater after walking out during a Mickey Mouse cartoon. The lady he's escorting lures him to the street with the line that had become a popular catchphrase: "This is where we came in." In any case, the newsreel that launched the film isn't one; it consists of clips from another crook movie, *You Only Live Once* (1937). Elsewhere in *Dillinger*, shots from Fritz Lang's film are slipped into a robbery sequence.

RESURRECTING TRADITION

Filmmakers of the 1940s, then, revised film-within-a-film schemas in complex, sometimes convoluted ways. What conditions might have fostered these developments? We can trace some sources of the new film-consciousness, from elite culture to mass culture.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s books and articles had chronicled Hollywood as a business. But during the late 1930s the artistic dimensions of film history got more attention than before, with several books devoted to the creative development of the medium. In 1938 came a translation of Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach's *Histoire du cinéma*, followed in 1939 by Lewis Jacobs's sweeping *The Rise of the American Film* and in 1943 by

Deems Taylor's *A Pictorial History of the Movies*.[13] The most massive testament to cinema's aesthetic heritage was *The Film Index: A Bibliography,* vol. 1, *The Film as Art* (1941), an annotated bibliography of film writing in English from the nineteenth century on. At the time it had no parallel in any other language.

The Film Index was a joint project of the Federal Writers' Project and the Museum of Modern Art. MoMA became the most important force in creating intellectual awareness of film culture. The Film Library, under the curatorship of Iris Barry, was founded in 1935 and began building a permanent archive. Barry worked hard. She translated Bardèche and Brasillach, arranged many retrospectives for MoMA's screening room, and encouraged studios and stars to hand over prints for preservation.[14]

Just as important was MoMA's efforts to circulate films outside New York. In 1936, Barry gathered dozens of titles from the Library into traveling 16mm programs that could be rented by schools, museums, and libraries. Accompanying these packages were notes supplying historical background.

Given that talkies were relatively recent, "film history" came to mean the silent cinema. MoMA's collection and circulating programs created a canon of official classics that gripped cinephiles for decades. Barry recast the Bardèche-Brasillach lineup to suit her tastes, which also reflected British ideas crystallized in the London Film Society programs, in Paul Rotha's *The Film Till Now* (1931), and in Raymond Spottiswoode's *Grammar of the Film* (1935). The resulting account of development—Auguste and Louis Lumière, Georges Méliès, Edwin S. Porter, D. W. Griffith, the silent clowns, the Scandinavians, the Germans, the Russians, and the French—shaped the tastes of the highbrow critics of the day.[15]

This canon was known to many in Hollywood as well.[16] A 1939 issue of *Daily Variety* celebrates film history in a survey that maps comfortably onto the trajectory of the MoMA canon.[17] In the same year the *Hollywood Reporter* ran an issue devoted to movies' twenty-fifth anniversary, and among memoirs of people from the early days are testaments to *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) and the films of Griffith.[18] F. Scott Fitzgerald's unfinished 1939–40 novel *The Love of the Last Tycoon* cites Griffith as inventor of

the close-up and mentions *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and Soviet montage. At one stage Fitzgerald considered calling the book *The Lumière Man*.[19] Before this period, a tyro director wouldn't educate himself by watching silent classics at MoMA, but George Sidney did just that.[20]

Older films circulated not only in MoMA prints but also in 8mm and 16mm copies for home use. One executive estimated that about 200,000 people owned small-gauge projectors.[21] Film collectors could buy or rent silent titles from Kodascope, Castle Films, and Bell and Howell. Some 1930s Hollywood hits were circulated in 16mm under studio licenses.[22]

On the big screen, a few theaters specialized in revivals through the thirties and forties.[23] Perennials were *Caligari*, *The Birth of a Nation*, *M*, and Chaplin's reissue of *The Gold Rush* in a sound version. In Los Angeles in 1942 one theater began screening silent films exclusively.[24] MoMA traveling programs showed at the city's American Contemporary Gallery and at a local high school, with shows introduced by Lillian Gish, Jean Renoir, and other luminaries.[25] Other MoMA programs appeared at the Hollywood Masonic Temple under the sponsorship of Fritz Lang, Kenneth Macgowan, and Edward Dmytryk.[26]

Film awareness slipped into mass-market cinema when Hollywood discovered that its inventory of old films could fill out programs. An occasional short like "You Can't Fool a Camera" (MGM, 1941) would revisit the earliest days of Eadweard Muybridge and Thomas Edison. Columbia's "Screen Snapshots" (1944) chronicled US cinema on the occasion of cinema's fiftieth anniversary.[27] (History, it seems, culminated in recent Columbia releases.) Later, when the industry sought to perk up failing attendance, the Academy put out a one-reel short, "Let's Go to the Movies" (1949), reviewing a bit of film history from Edison to contemporary sound pictures. It launched a series of films explaining the work that went into film production.

Around town people still glimpsed the pioneers, including the purported father of it all. Griffith released his final feature, *The Struggle*, in 1932 and was given a special Academy Award in 1935. MoMA secured his collection and mounted a publicity campaign on his behalf, culminating in a major 1940 exhibi-

tion. "D. W. Griffith: American Film Master" was accompanied by a lavish monograph written by Barry. The show included four Biograph shorts, all to become classics, and a film that analyzed Griffith's editing technique in one sequence of *Birth of a Nation*.[28] A Los Angeles retrospective followed, with several features drawn from MoMA's collection.[29] After Griffith died in 1948, some of his early films were revived in local theaters.

When the protagonist of Mitchell Wilson's novel *The Panic-Stricken* (1946) drops in at MoMA, he's annoyed to hear the audience giggling at *Hearts of the World* (1918). He ought not to have been surprised. Despite the respect paid to Griffith's technical innovations, his films, and indeed most silent dramas, were largely considered outdated.[30] The occasional nostalgia piece, such as William Saroyan's 1939 recollection of 1917, "the year in which I left the world and went to heaven in the picture theatres," spoke for the old folks and a film buff minority.[31]

The industry's insistence on progress made silent films seem absurdly archaic. Already in the 1930s, MGM's Pete Smith Specialties had spliced together old clips accompanied by wisecracking commentary. The idea was taken up more systematically at RKO, where Richard Fleischer supervised a series of "Flicker Flashbacks" released between 1943 and 1945.[32] Each consisted of two films from the period 1908–12, chopped to a reel each with mocking narration, music, and sound effects added. Although they sometimes featured prints of good quality, their purpose was to arouse cheap laughs at the melodramatic situations and overheated acting. The narrator notes at one point, "Emmy uses Facial Expression No. 25, to denote suspicion."

Yet not all old films were considered ridiculous. The 1940s sharpened a divide in audiences' sense of silent cinema that hasn't vanished today. An article signed by Lloyd Bacon sums it up: "The patrons may laugh AT oldtime dramas, but they laugh WITH oldtime comedies."[33]

For most tastemakers, whatever the merits of some silent blockbusters (*The Birth of a Nation*, *Ben-Hur*, *The Ten Commandments*, *The Big Parade*), the vitality of film before sound was typified by slapstick. Its masters were still around, and more visible than Griffith. Chaplin was still making films (*The Great Dictator*,

1941; *Monsieur Verdoux*, 1947) and was seldom out of the public eye. Hal Roach produced thirty B features throughout the 1940s. Buster Keaton appeared in films and stage productions, and journalists tapped him, Mack Sennett, and Harold Lloyd for reminiscences of the good old days. In 1940 a MoMA retrospective, "Forty Years of Film Comedy," provoked Bosley Crowther's *New York Times* tribute to the Keystone Kops and their successors.[34] A 1943 Warners short, *Happy Times and Jolly Moments*, resurrected Sennett's stars. At revival houses slapstick was a mainstay, and it topped the list of home movie rentals.

James Agee's famous 1949 essay, "Comedy's Greatest Era,"[35] crystallized the growing sentiment that slapstick of the 1910s and 1920s was the supreme achievement of American silent cinema. Echoing Gilbert Seldes on comedy as the essence of cinematic motion, Lloyd Bacon summed up the critical consensus: "They were probably the 'purest' motion pictures ever made."[36]

CELEBRATION AND CONDESCENSION

Three films stand out as both celebrating and criticizing comedy's greatest era.[37] *Hollywood Cavalcade* (1939) is a *film à clef* in which Alice Faye is more or less Mabel Normand and Don Ameche plays a hybrid of Mack Sennett and Cecil B. DeMille. The plot takes liberties with history (Buster Keaton is credited with inventing the custard-pie fight), but Sennett, hired as a consultant for the production, claimed that its presentation of old-time filmmaking routine was accurate.[38] An inside joke emerges when Ameche turns down a chance to hire a dog star; Fox studio chief Darryl F. Zanuck, who personally produced *Hollywood Cavalcade*, launched his career writing scripts for Rin Tin Tin.

But *Hollywood Cavalcade* is no simple pastiche of the silent cinema; its passages of slapstick give way to romantic melodrama. Ameche is too absorbed in ever-bigger movie projects to woo Faye. When Faye is injured in a car crash, the producer wants to scrap her current project, but Ameche remakes the film in the new sound-on-film process. Bolstered by Ameche's faith, the sound version succeeds.

The Perils of Pauline (1947) turns melodramatic too. It starts

as a bouncy musical that uses early cinema as a showcase for fizzy Betty Hutton. Brash young Pearl White is too unbridled for the stage, which demands dignity and refinement, but her arm-waving physicality is just the thing for movie serials. She becomes a star but finds herself unhappy because the man of her dreams, a priggish theater actor, disdains her calling. Once the serial craze fades, Pearl returns to the stage in a boisterous show. Again a severe accident—here, a fall from a curtain—turns the plot pathetic. The return of her beloved from the war gives her the strength to recover.

In *The Perils of Pauline*, the contrast between the restraint of stage acting and the uninhibited pantomime of movies distinguishes high culture (boring) from popular culture (engaging). In *Merton of the Movies* (1947), the distinction between subtle and broad acting is mapped onto two types of 1910s film: the drama and the comedy. Merton Gill, convinced he can become a great tragedian, leaves his hometown for Hollywood. He works his way into bit parts thinking his hamming is welcome. Actually, nobody has told him he's hilariously bad, and the director secretly builds a comedy around him. Only when Merton sees the preview audience laughing at his posturing does he realize that he's fit only for slapstick. The pathos of the perennial optimist crushed by an unfeeling society fits the sad-clown persona of the star, Red Skelton.

In the three films, celebration of the 1910s and 1920s mingles with condescension. Both *The Perils of Pauline* and *Merton of the Movies* contain explanatory prologues that are virtually apologies, reminding us that movies were once simpler and less demanding. And within each film, the execution doesn't live up to the heights of silent cinema. The custard-pie combats in *Hollywood Cavalcade* are labored; Pearl White never becomes a good "serious" actress; Merton needs a compassionate woman to tell him he should accept being a comedian. Such films dignify the industry and give it a "usable past," a respectable lineage of popular entertainment. Yet as satires on formats long gone, all insist that silent cinema was energetic but crude, outstripped by modern filmmaking.

This brew of patronizing nostalgia curdles in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). There the stars of yesteryear become "waxworks," and the diva who pathetically imitates Chaplin fantasizes that she can

make a comeback today. *Sunset Boulevard*'s cynicism overlaps that of Hollywood novels like Harold Robbins's *The Dream Merchants* (1950) and Richard Brooks's *The Producer* (1951), which offer disillusioned versions of the industry's past and present.

A more ingratiating portrayal of old moviemaking comes in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), which begins where *Hollywood Cavalcade* leaves off. This account of Hollywood's transition to talkies avoids melodrama in favor of light comedy, and its musical numbers and sound-recording gags integrate the disruptive reflexivity of *Hellzapoppin'*. The film inventively revises the now-standard iconography of silent movies; instead of pie fights, we get cake flung in characters' faces, and the spoof of hammy pantomime is enhanced by unexpected scrapes and clunks captured by the microphone.

The plot traces the rising-star schema three times over. The opening flashbacks illustrate Don Lockwood's climb from stuntman to lead player (while undercutting his varnished voice-over account of it). "Broadway Melody" presents a hoofer-makes-good musical number. And the main romantic plot elevates chorus girl Kathy into a singing star. *Singin' in the Rain*, the subtlest entry in the movie nostalgia cycle, blends parody, pastiche, reflexivity, and a respect for the brash exuberance that Hollywood saw in the era of transition.

CINEPHILE DIRECTORS

There's some evidence that, faced with looming antitrust action by the government, the studios used 1930s features and shorts to defend the industry as a well-run business. If Hollywood was perceived as a major American enterprise, essentially like others, claims of monopoly power would be easier to block.[39] In this light, Hollywood's 1940s exploration of cinema as a cultural institution with its own significant history could be seen as a rejoinder to antimonopoly pressures. Sometimes, though, the concern for Hollywood history bespoke a genuine appreciation, even nostalgia, for the artistry of days gone by.[40]

You might expect that older filmmakers who lived through the silents and the transition to talkies would present their own

pasts fairly respectfully. Yet Irving Cummings, director of *Hollywood Cavalcade*, and George Marshall, who directed *The Perils of Pauline*, didn't hesitate to skew their presentation toward modern tastes. Accurate in detail as the films sometimes are (*Perils* shows a remarkable array of side-by-side sets erected in an alley), they mostly disparage the old days. Two younger talents were more inclined to treat filmmaking as an ambitious artistic enterprise and film history as something worthy of respect.

Preston Sturges, for one, delighted in inside jokes that went beyond the self-conscious japes of Olsen and Johnson. *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* (1944) includes characters from *The Great McGinty* (1940), while in *Hail the Conquering Hero* (1944), a billboard advertises *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*.[41] A similar gesture can be found in Orson Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), in which the town newspaper carries the column written by the drama critic Jed Leland of *Citizen Kane*. For both Sturges and Welles, it seems, cinematic narrative creates a parallel world in which the author can link different stories in ways that only a devotee will notice.

More deeply, Sturges and Welles considered film history neither crude nor quaint. A satiric behind-the-scenes picture like *Sullivan's Travels* (1942) name-drops current talents like Capra, DeMille, Bob Hope, and Jack Benny. But it's also peppered with references to Keystone Kops, bathing beauties, and Lubitsch. Like Merton and Pauline's lover, Sullivan values drama above comedy and looks for something serious to fulfill his career. The film's opening scene of two men tussling on a thundering railroad car is revealed to be simply a film that Sullivan is screening, but it's no less dramatic for that, and it prefigures a deeply serious scene in a railway yard later. Bumming around, Sullivan is inveigled into a small-town screening of the dire fare he thinks is uplifting. He notices that the sober drama fails to silence squalling babies and burping popcorn munchers. Sullivan will learn the power of more charming entertainment when he sees *Playful Pluto* screened for his chain-gang mates. This isn't a revelation of his true talent, as it is with Merton's screen debut; it's a suggestion that Hollywood's comic tradition, however superficial it can

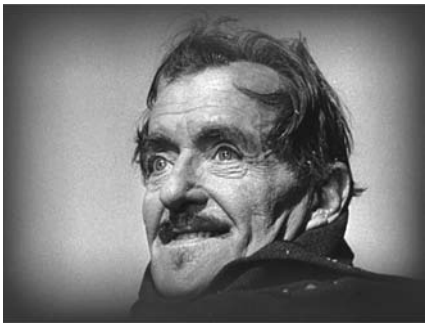
seem, fulfills a deep social need. In a world of pain, amusement is precious.

Likewise, *The Sin of Harold Diddlebock* (1947; aka *Mad Wednesday*) goes a step beyond other filmmakers' efforts to blend found footage with fictional scenes. Sturges opens his film with the climax of Harold Lloyd's 1925 film *The Freshman* (while wedging in some shots of his own). Lloyd's persona, Lewis Jacobs had argued in 1939, typified an entire generation's ambitions.[42] True to Sturges's belief in *Sucker sapiens*, subspecies *americanus*, he makes this go-getter his new target. Twenty-some years after scoring the touchdown, Harold Diddlebock is still bent over his desk, fussing with sleeve protectors and mooning over a succession of sisters working in the office.

If there is a critique of the sunny simplicity of 1920s comedy here, it cuts much deeper than usual. Sturges sees desperation in the frantic energy of Lloyd's original character, so he allows him a single day in which his middle-aged self can find nonconformist release. When Harold's adventures take him onto a skyscraper ledge while tethered to a lion, Sturges cites Lloyd's thrill comedies *High and Dizzy* (1920) and *Safety Last* (1923). Sound filming forced Sturges to use rear projection rather than Lloyd's original location shooting, but the sequence nonetheless announces that a modern filmmaker could pay tribute to the masters' clowning.

Orson Welles came to direction as a cinephile. When the filmwise were beginning to appreciate silent comedy, he devised his own amateur chase in *Too Much Johnson* (1938) after studying films by Chaplin, Sennett, and Lloyd.[43] Soon after arriving in Los Angeles, he considered making a film about Hollywood's early days.[44] When Welles was preparing *Citizen Kane* (1941), the studios' print-sharing policies allowed him to immerse himself in film history.[45]

Before *Harold Diddlebock* revamped the inserted-footage convention, the "News on the March" reel in *Kane* was the sequence to beat. Here the absorption of realism by artifice so characteristic of the 1940s reaches a peak of virtuoso fakery. For perhaps the first time in film history, newly made shots were given scratches,



11.8. *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942): The early sequences include images vignetted in the manner of silent films. Compare the sequence in *The Guilt of Janet Ames* (IM.14, p. 338).

11.9. A more obvious homage to cinema history is the wistful iris-out that concludes *Ambersons'* snow scene. Compare KLJN.7, p. 107.

jumps, and speeded-up motion to masquerade as archival footage.[46] This sequence recognizes that film history comes down to us in a fragmentary, distressed way, to be repurposed to suit our needs.

Finally, in gestures both playful and respectful, Welles reaches far back into the silent era. In a sequence excised from the release print of *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), George imagines Lucy begging for his love, appearing "in old-fashioned transparency (the shadowy ghost figure from the silents)."[47] The finished film managed to insert other allusions (figs. 11.8 and 11.9). The cast credits at the film's end replicate the sort of introduction of the main players we get in early films: a filmed portrait of each actor, often turning his or her head slightly, as if to acknowledge the audience.[48]

Only the sharp-eyed aficionado will spot the more personal homages. As George Minafer and Lucy Morgan stroll through their midwestern town, they pass a movie house. One poster announces a film starring Jack Holt (father to Tim, who is playing George)—a furtive in-joke like Sturges's.[49] Apart from this shout-out, the other posters exhibit a nerdish precision: each one trumpets a film or stage show that could plausibly have played the Bijou in 1912.

One hoarding advertises a Western, *The Ghost at Circle X Camp* (1912), from Gaston Méliès. Surely the name evokes Gas-

ton's brother Georges, by then a key player in the standard outline of film history. This sort of sideswiping tribute from one magician-cineaste to another was consistent with the unique film-consciousness of the 1940s, an era when some filmmakers, going beyond showbiz narcissism, paid homage to a tradition they were proud to claim as their own.

INTERLUDE

Hitchcock and Welles: The Lessons of the Masters

EARLY IN THE 1940S TWO OF CINEMA'S GREATEST DIRECTORS made their Hollywood debuts. One launched his career, the other reinvented himself on a new scale. They became the most consistently experimental and influential filmmakers of the period, and they never really left the forties behind.

Orson Welles was a polymath, a twenty-five-year-old whose first feature triggered intense controversy. Alfred Hitchcock was a fortyish émigré whose American debut garnered an Academy Award for Best Picture. Both were masters of adjacent media: Welles had conquered radio and the stage, while Hitchcock adapted one of the most popular novels of the period, launched a successful radio program called *Suspense*, and eventually oversaw his own magazine and television show. Bernard Herrmann supplied both directors with memorably daring musical scores. Both favored thrillers; Welles carried a trunkload of them on his travels, and his Shakespeare adaptations were accused of pulpiness. Hitchcock branched out into black comedy and straight drama, but sooner or later he returned to the wry suspense pictures that had made him famous.

Circumstances made Welles peripatetic. Scraping up cash by acting in others' movies, he shot films abroad, then left them uncompleted for years, some in variant versions. He was out-

rageously undisciplined, failing to show up on his own set and, when he did, constantly improvising new effects. Hitchcock, meticulous in preparation and running his sound stage like a purring Rolls, stayed ensconced in the studio system. After a rough period in the late forties, he racked up box office triumphs, becoming, with DeMille and Jerry Lewis, one of the few American directors known to a global mass audience. While Welles dodged tax collectors and decamped from hotels in the dead of night, Hitchcock wound up a part owner of Universal Studios.[1]

Both were public performers, two fat men who loved food, wine, and plus-sized cigars. Welles took acting jobs to keep money coming in, while Hitchcock carefully cultivated a branded image through interviews and onscreen appearances. Both were sacred monsters: Welles thunderous and explosive, Hitchcock calmly musing on the best way to kill a blonde. Projecting Jeevesian hauteur on television every Sunday night—"Good eeeve-ning"—Hitchcock was familiar to everyone. Welles became known less for his films than for conjuring in Vegas casinos, performing Shakespearean monologues on chat shows, and voicing much-mocked wine commercials. Yet he retained his charisma among the cognoscenti. As one critic wrote, "It is absurd to expect Orson Welles to attempt anything less than the impossible. It is all that is left to him."[2]

During Hitchcock's final years, his reputation among cinephiles grew hugely, despite films that didn't find favor with either critics or a large public. Welles went out with an emotionally piercing Shakespeare adaptation, a whimsical pseudodocumentary in the first-person singular, and a litter of unfinished projects. Both men were sometimes denounced as mountebanks, but eventually they ruled film culture. In the most influential critics' poll, *Citizen Kane* was voted the best film of all time until *Vertigo* displaced it.

To a greater extent than their contemporaries, they carved out new formal options. But their very originality created problems of competition. Once the new schemas were out there, anyone could imagine telling a story through multiple flashbacks, embedding a film within a film, restricting our knowledge to a single character, or ringing changes on thriller premises. To stay promi-

nent, Welles and Hitchcock had to outrun their imitators, and themselves. This *fuite en avant* required the courage to take risks, not all of which came off.

Their later work further developed the techniques that crystallized in their first Hollywood years. Well into the 1970s they preserved distinctive forties methods of plotting and narration. They stretched their own talents, and they taught others.

HITCH OUT-HITCHES HITCH

Asked about Hitchcock in 1967, Welles compared him to Edgar Wallace: "His contrivances remain contrivances, no matter how marvelously they're conceived and executed. I don't honestly believe that Hitchcock is a director whose pictures will be of any interest a hundred years from now."[3] Fifty years and counting, the interest only grows.

Hitchcock beat Welles to the awards circuit with *Rebecca* (1940). He had already lifted the British tradition of murder stories to new levels with *The Lodger* (1926), an adaptation of Marie Belloc Lowndes's classic domestic thriller. *Blackmail* (1929) also relies on narrational conventions of that genre: the killer's identity is known at the start, and she must escape punishment. Just as important were five spy films, several of which showed ordinary people caught up in international intrigue. A 1936 article noted that "Mr. Hitchcock's long and strong suit is suspense."[4] By the time Hitchcock arrived in America, he had found his brand identity.[5]

With the exception of the comedy *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (1941), Hitchcock's earliest Hollywood films sustained his reputation for high tension. The hugely successful *Rebecca* was followed by two more domestic thrillers, *Suspicion* (1941) and *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943). Sandwiched between these were two spy chases, *Foreign Correspondent* (1940) and *Saboteur* (1942). In all, Hitchcock's films of 1940–43 helped launch the emergence of full-blown suspense pictures in the years that followed. The films fitted comfortably into the Murder Culture ruling American popular media. Precisely shot and cut, they supplied templates for both the woman-in-peril plot and the man-on-the-run plot. At the same

time, Hitchcock traced out options for restricted knowledge and subjective viewpoints.

One variant of the domestic thriller involves an enigmatic husband. What does he really want? Is he trying to kill his wife? Both *Rebecca* and *Suspicion* provided somewhat problematic models. Du Maurier's novel made Maxim de Winter guilty of Rebecca's death, leaving the couple to escape punishment but live with their horrendous secret. To placate the Breen Office, Selznick and Hitchcock modified the plot to make Rebecca's death an accident, covered up by Maxim. Other changes streamlined the action, excising the musings that fill the book and dosing du Maurier's plot with local tension. Once the heroine is married to Maxim, the stress falls upon her worry that he will never come to love her as he loved Rebecca. Much of the drama comes from the bullying of the housekeeper Mrs. Danvers and the heroine's fear of social embarrassment. Only late in the plot do questions about Rebecca's mysterious death emerge.

Uxoricide takes on a different shape in the source novel of *Suspicion* (1941), in which a woman realizes that her husband intends to kill her. Again, the screen version had to be fudged. *Suspicion*'s heroine has misinterpreted Johnny, and at the climax he intends to kill himself, not his wife. Making the husband a successful killer was forbidden by both the Hays Office and Cary Grant's star image. But if Johnny isn't stalking her, the wife's fears become groundless.[6] Among trade press disapproval, the *Hollywood Reporter* offered an especially sour comment: "Certainly the melodramatic and tawdry ending as it now stands will completely throw and stupefy an audience and kill any possible word-of-mouth build-up."[7]

The problem is how to victimize the sympathetic wife, keep her alive at the end, and provide a unified couple. Meeting one or two of these conditions isn't quite enough. The solution was already laid out in a 1937 English film, *Love from a Stranger*, which Hitchcock surely knew.[8] A woman who realizes that her husband intends to kill her escapes death with the aid of her former suitor. He becomes what Diane Waldman has called a "helper male"—a figure who can rescue the heroine and supply a romantic alliance once the murderous husband has been eliminated.[9] But Hitch-

cock couldn't radically revise *Rebecca* or *Suspicion* to provide a helper male, so the resolutions had to end in an impasse. Interestingly, when MGM filmed Patrick Hamilton's play *Gaslight* (1944), the plot was recast to make the inspector an appropriate mate for the rescued wife. Revising the schema yields a happier ending.

Shadow of a Doubt solved the difficulties of the two earlier woman-in-peril films. A freer range of narration allows suspense to build: the opening man-on-the-run episode, confined largely to Uncle Charlie, segues into the Santa Rosa milieu. That centers on what Young Charlie suspects and eventually discovers. Now she becomes her uncle's target. In accordance with Mitchell Wilson's suggestion that the victim in a suspense plot must fight back, she turns on her tormentor, forcing him to leave town. Although much of this portion is focused on Young Charlie, we get glimpses of Uncle Charlie on his own; unlike *Suspicio*n, the film leaves no doubt about his murderous intent. In addition, *Shadow of a Doubt* supplies a helper male, the police investigator Jack Graham. Hitchcock dismissed the character as a concession to romance,[10] and Jack doesn't rescue Young Charlie during the climax on the train. Still, he leads her to discover her uncle's real nature and provides a stable resolution, mitigating a little the devastation that Young Charlie feels.

Hitchcock, then, offered other filmmakers models of what to do and what to avoid. But the burst of psychological suspense stories at all budget levels left him less room to innovate. Many variations were emerging. Woman-in-peril plots featuring murderous husbands became commonplace, and they often displayed ingenious tactics of restricted point of view, as in *My Name Is Julia Ross* (1945) and *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1948). Likewise, many men were on the run in 1940s cinema, and Hitchcock's international variant found counterparts in *Man Hunt* (1941), *Ministry of Fear* (1944), *The Confidential Agent* (1945), and others.

At typical forties speed the competition was heating up. A 1941 review of *Ladies in Retirement* praised it for providing Hitchcockian suspense.[11] "The novel story line" of *Crossroads* (1942), noted a *Variety* critic in June 1942, "would do credit to an Alfred Hitchcock thriller."[12] Richard Wallace's direction of *The Fallen Sparrow* (1943) was said to be "reminiscent of the Hitchcock

touch."[13] Billy Wilder confessed that *Double Indemnity* sought to "out-Hitch Hitch," and Hitchcock genially acknowledged the rivalry.[14] The Master's name was invoked in discussions of films by Val Lewton and even Walt Disney.[15] The radio program *Suspense* was designed to bring to radio "the particular kind of suspense developed in pictures by Alfred Hitchcock."[16]

With the thriller firmly established and so many variants of suspense situations proliferating, how was the Master to maintain his cinematic identity? One way was through brand promotion.[17] In interviews and public talks Hitchcock differentiated the detective story from his sort of thriller. His distinction between suspense and surprise was picked up by Charlotte Armstrong, Helen McCloy, and other thriller practitioners.[18] He emphasized that much of suspense comes down to range of knowledge. "The author may let both reader and character share the knowledge of the nature of the dangers which threaten. . . . Sometimes, however, the reader alone may realize that peril is in the offing, and watch the characters moving to meet it in blissful ignorance and disquieting unconcern."[19]

Hitchcock pronounced on principles of suspenseful narration throughout the 1940s, drawing examples from whatever project he had in hand. (In *Rope*, that the audience knows the killers from the start "makes for real suspense.")[20] He became the foremost practitioner and theorist of the new genre. From this perspective, it seems that Mitchell Wilson's 1947 piece on the thriller was largely codifying things that the Master had been saying.

As if to counter the extreme restriction of viewpoint in *Rebecca* and *Suspicion*, and the shuttling between the two Charlies in *Shadow of a Doubt*, he put utterly unrestricted narration to work in *Notorious* (1946). This blend of the endangered-woman situation with spy intrigue puts us one jump ahead of the characters throughout. Because we're aware of the plan to insinuate Alicia Huberman into Sebastian's household in *Notorious*, any flicker of suspicion on his part seems ominous. At the climax, we're let in on the plans of Sebastian and his mother to poison Alicia. From that position we can become apprehensive when Devlin misinterprets Alicia's wooziness as her return to alcohol: Will he prove to be the helper male? At a more local level, we get classic suspense

in the party scene, when the champagne runs out while Alicia and Devlin are prowling the wine cellar. The virtuoso climax presents a crossfire of four characters' optical POVs as the couple descend the stairs toward freedom.

Across these years Hitchcock pulled his own switcheroos. *Spellbound* (1945) integrated the suspense thriller with the talking cure in a way that other filmmakers would follow. The courtroom drama *The Paradine Case* (1948), a contract-fulfilling job, offered sexual explicitness, along with the technical challenges of a colossal set and multiple-camera coverage. *Under Capricorn* (1949) sought to blend historical romance with another woman-in-peril plot. Always sensitive to what others were doing, Hitchcock offered his own characteristically extreme experiment in site-constrained plotting, *Lifeboat* (1944). With *Rope*, he radicalized the forties return to theatricality and the fashion for the long take, finding ways to restrict knowledge and mimic optical POV without cutting.

Stage Fright (1950) featured sneaky ways of concealing a lying flashback: Don't present contesting versions of events (cf. *Crossfire*, 1947), put it at the very start to build on first impressions, and let it issue from a character shown as initially sympathetic.[21] Even more cleverly, Hitchcock cements our trust in the lying flashback through that characteristic forties device, a flashback within a flashback. Replaying false events as if they are spontaneous character memory helps convince us they're true.

THE FORTIES REFORMULATED

Hitchcock's later work relied on some basic 1940s formal trends. *The Wrong Man* (1957) showed that his methods were compatible with the semidocumentary format. The film came complete with the standard external narrator (Hitch himself) attesting to the story as 100 percent factual. *Dial M for Murder* (1954) confines itself almost completely to a single apartment in the manner of site-specific films.[22] ("I am treating it in a modified *Rope* style.")[23] *The Trouble with Harry* (1956) unfolds in a single day, in the vein of *Union Station* (1950) and other plots with tight time schemes, while, granting the trademark Hitchcock drollery, it owes some-

thing to earlier corpse-strewn comedies like *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944) and *Murder, He Says* (1945). *Marnie* (1964) is a sexily updated psychiatrical, with the husband as analyst and a revelatory flashback to childhood trauma, as in *The Locket* (1946). *Rear Window* (1954) became the pluperfect instance of the disbelieved-witness plot seen in *The Window* (1949) and its mates. And for decades Hitchcock hoped to film J. M. Barrie's play *Mary Rose*, whose somber romanticism would have had a strong affinity with *Portrait of Jennie* (1949) and other ghost fantasies.[24]

Seizing on forties schemas, he knew he had to treat them with the Hitchcock touch. *The Wrong Man*, he said, was a counter to the semidocumentary conventions because it took the viewpoint of the imprisoned man, not the selfless investigator on the outside, as in *Call Northside 777* (1948).[25] In notes for *Marnie*, he worried about inserting an auditory flashback when Mark recognizes Marnie as a thief: "I hate to resort to those kind of easy tricks."[26] When he turned to internal monologue, he refashioned it for unusual purposes, as in the ambigendered epilogue of *Psycho* (1960) and in the pleading voice-over of the television episode "Breakdown": the protagonist, believed dead by onlookers, is actually paralyzed. "The main problem one has, in my particular field, is the avoidance of the cliché."[27]

Like Welles, Hitchcock never lost his taste for adaptation, and he kept up with trends. *Strangers on a Train* (1951) acknowledged that Patricia Highsmith's recent novel had renewed the thriller, and he declared the project "the real beginning" of his filmmaking career.[28] As in the book, the film gives us all the information we need to follow how Guy Haines, tennis star, is caught in the murder swap proposed by Bruno Anthony. Bruno's murder of Guy's wife, presented at the twenty-six-minute turning point, caps the film's setup and prepares for the central action: Bruno's escalating demands that Guy kill Bruno's father. While alternating between Guy and Bruno, the narration accentuates particular moments through restricted POV, as when Guy discovers Bruno watching him at a tennis match.

The same bouncing between killer and suspect, triggered by a murder at the end of the film's setup phase, would inform *Frenzy* (1972), another adaptation. Here Hitchcock added a de-

laying device similar to the dropped lighter of *Strangers*: under time pressure, the serial killer Rusk must retrieve his incriminating tiepin by cracking open a corpse's clenched fingers. The omniscience built into alternating the hero/villain story lines becomes comic in *Family Plot* (1976). Here we learn fairly early that the missing heir sought by the ne'er-do-well couple is a partner in a string of kidnappings. The original novel shifts the spotlight among several characters, but the film reduces the plot to an elegant hourglass geometry: two couples' paths intersect through mutual investigation and comic coincidences.

Judiciously unrestricted narration shows up in other guises. *The Wrong Man* begins by attaching us to Manny the musician, but it quickly widens to show how, behind the scenes, witnesses and hardheaded police detectives set his arrest in motion. The high point of the departures from Manny's range of knowledge comes just minutes before the end when, after Manny's prayer, we're shown the right man captured during a robbery. *I Confess* (1953) utilizes even wider-ranging narration, largely because the passive protagonist, the priest Father Logan, cannot divulge what the killer Otto has told him. Therefore we're given access to Otto and his scheming with his wife, to the pitiless police investigator, and to the married woman still in love with Logan, who unwittingly builds a case that he's the guilty one. In these films, our sympathy for the protagonist increases when he doesn't fully understand the forces aligned against him.

Disdaining traditional detective stories, Hitchcock sometimes claimed to avoid pure mystery. Yet mystery, which creates investigation plots and triggers the spectator's curiosity, was crucial to his American thrillers, from the enigmas around Rebecca to the puzzle of the lost heir in *Family Plot*.[29] Mystery can be generated by restricting knowledge, suspense by broadening it. Throughout his later career, Hitchcock juggled the two in a great variety of ways.

One problem involves timing. If you start attached to a single character, when do you open out to a wider range of knowledge? Some films provide it early in the complicating action phase—that is, around the second half hour. Initially *Torn Curtain* (1966) is largely confined to Professor Armstrong's fiancée, but after the

HW.1. *Vertigo* (1958): Having agreed to go out with Scottie, Judy turns to the camera as if in desperation. After this bold variant of 1940s to-camera address, she will sit down to write the letter confessing her role in the murder scheme.

first turning point his defection is exposed as a deception. *North by Northwest* (1959) follows Roger Thornhill's adventures up to his implication in murder. At the start of the complicating action, a scene in spy headquarters informs us that the agent Thornhill is pursuing doesn't exist. Apart from establishing the chase that dominates the rest of the film, the information is given a comic tint, as a government official confirms by asking, "It's so horribly sad. How is it I feel like laughing?" More controversially, in *Vertigo* (1958) Judy's crucial flashback unmasking her role in gulling Scottie comes very late, at the end of the development phase (fig. HW.1).[30] It precipitates the climax, which allows us to watch Scottie's reaction when he discovers the conspiracy.

Whenever the revelation comes, mystery (Why does the American physicist defect? Who is George Kaplan? Why does Judy seem to be Madeleine's twin?) can give way to suspense. Both qualities can blend if the wider knowledge we're given is teasingly equivocal; some mystery lingers. In *Rear Window* (1954), while Jeff sleeps the narration shows us a woman leaving the fateful apartment he's been watching. Coming quite early in the complicating action phase, the scene casts doubt on Jeff's murder speculations. The absent wife might be alive. Mystery becomes paramount as Jeff and Lisa play detective, but localized suspense rules whenever it seems that the killer will learn of their surveillance. The central mystery is dispelled at the climax, when Lisa finds the crucial evidence. At that point suspense takes over as the killer attacks her, then Jeff.

Hitchcock, still reliant on adaptation, began to explore bifurcated plot structures. *Topaz* (1969) falls into two parts, one involving Soviet missiles in Cuba, the other concentrating on the search for a mole among French spymasters. The two lines of action are

initiated sequentially by the Russian defector who guides the American investigation, and they're consummated by a French spy charged with investigating both matters.

Far bolder is the split structure of *Psycho* (1960). The duplicitous third-person narration of Robert Bloch's 1959 novel owed a good deal to experiments on display in 1940s literary thrillers.[31] Bloch shifts between Norman Bates and the woman on the run who becomes the newest victim. The film, by contrast, initially restricts itself to Marion so that, at the high point of the setup, her death forces the plot to start over. Only then does Hitchcock adopt moving-spotlight narration that, through ellipses and stylistic stratagems, keeps the secret that Bloch masked through unmarked subjective passages. *Psycho*'s wiping out a protagonist distantly recalls the forties war films in which a squad carries on without its leader, and the decoupling of Marion's story line can be seen as a faint revision of block-construction premises. But the abruptness is magnified by our initial tight attachment to Marion, creating something of a switch on the abrupt, apparently fatal disappearance of Celia in Lang's *Secret Beyond the Door* (1948).

The forties' interest in subjective states had harmonized with Hitchcock's inclinations, and he easily went from optical POV experiments to deeper regions, as in *Spellbound*'s dream passage. *Mary Rose* would have included not only Wellesian voice-over narration from an onlooker but also subjective sound and camerawork for the ghost. Later films plunged freely into mental life. The suffused bursts of red intruding on Marnie's vision become color equivalents of the distorted hallucinations of 1940s cinema. The director who had declared "Flashback? Ugh!" in his *Rebecca* period came to rely on the device for both brief interjections and lengthy backstory. *I Confess* features a flashback that runs a remarkable twelve minutes. It's recounted to skeptical authorities as objective fact, but its gauzy imagery and lyrical *vocalise* are shot through with the woman's romantic longing in ways akin to passages in *Lydia* (1941).

Vertigo constitutes a thoroughgoing compilation/revision of 1940s subjective devices. The obsessive optical POV shots of Scottie trailing Madeleine give way to a dream tricked out with pulsating color, abstract rear projections, stark geometric

patterns, and animated flowers. Scottie's embrace of Judy-as-Madeleine employs not only a circular tracking shot but rear projection that glides them out of the apartment and back into the stable. Hitchcock claimed this device captures Scottie's experiential memory better than the traditional flashback, and it plainly functions as a revision of the classic schema.[32] Likewise, the famous track-and-zoom, squeeze-and-stretch imagery constitutes a fresh way to render Scottie's vertigo. Hitchcock had originally conceived the effect for a fainting scene in *Rebecca*, but he had lacked the technical means to execute it.[33] Along with all the other echoes—portraits, therapy for a traumatized man, voice-over confessions, point-of-view switches, the hint of a reincarnated or time-traveling woman—the powerful probes of subjectivity make *Vertigo*, though released in 1958, one of the most typical forties movies.

That shouldn't be surprising. Based on a novel by French writers much influenced by US suspense literature and Hitchcock's own films, *Vertigo* arises from a feedback loop. It measures how strongly 1940s conventions were stamped on the thriller genre as a whole. It also reminds us that Hitchcock's distinctive reworking of 1940s schemas shaped the fiction and films that followed him, from the creation of the slasher film in the wake of *Psycho* to the "nameless scourge" films deriving from *The Birds* (1963). No director has garnered more pastiches, "homages," and veiled remakes. His films have influenced movies as various as *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *Sisters* (1973), *The Fog* (1980), *The Client* (1994), *Panic Room* (2002), *Phone Booth* (2003), *Munich* (2006), and *Side Effects* (2013). Beyond the thriller, Hitchcock provided a model of exacting, disciplined filmmaking. Through the power of his films and his brand authority, 1940s narrative innovations lived on for decades.

YOUR DISOBEDIENT SERVANT

Like John Ford and Fritz Lang, Hitchcock carried the pictorial dynamism of silent cinema into 1940s Hollywood. He disliked "photographing people talking" and declared that dialogue scenes needed to be visually arresting. The wordless opening sequences

of *Rear Window*, *I Confess*, *Vertigo*, and *Torn Curtain* ask us to build up the story situation, though soon enough there's a dialogue passage that allows us to check our conclusions.

Orson Welles also had a commitment to visual storytelling, but he came at it from a different angle. His stage productions embodied the trend coming to be called Theatricalism. With affinities for the Elizabethan theater and vaudeville, Theatricalism was pioneered by European directors Vsevolod Meyerhold and Erwin Piscator, who worked with bare stages and "presentational" performance styles. The trend broke with both Naturalism and Symbolism by admitting the sheer artificiality of the stage space.

Mordecai Gorelik, who scrutinized this trend in a widely read 1940 book, singled out Welles's *Julius Caesar* production (1937) as the prototype of Theatricalism, American-style.[34] *Caesar* and other Mercury Theatre productions galvanized New York audiences with their direct address, thrust stages, minimal settings, and unrealistic lighting cues. Welles noted at the time, "People should not be fooled. They should know they are in the theatre, and with that knowledge, they may be taken to any height of which the magic of words and light is capable of taking them. This is a return to the Elizabethan and Greek theatre."[35]

Theatricalism developed on the stage, but its premises could be transferred to radio. Welles believed that ambitious art had to work closely with the specifics of each medium. Just as theater was essentially a matter of a stage and performers and "the magic of words and light," so radio had its own basic qualities—the possibilities created by sound of all types. "The less a radio drama resembles a play," he wrote, "the better it is likely to be."[36] The intimate address of radio welcomes the narrator and the auditory chorus, along with music and sound effects. Like stage productions, Welles's broadcasts could freely acknowledge artifice in their own medium, with multiple narrators, auditory montages, and direct address to the listener, all backed by rich soundscapes.

In cinema, Welles could take the Theatricalist impulse to another level. What is medium-specific about cinema if not the camera? Result: *Heart of Darkness* (1939), his never-filmed effort in first-person cinema, with the narrator's optical viewpoint accompanied by voice-over commentary. Occasionally Marlow is

made to look at the audience. Welles's plan anticipates 1940s subjective cinema, but it's a logical transfer of his "first-person singular" radio strategy and the illusion-breaking tactics of the Mercury stage shows.

The POV device has shock value, and this quality too owes something to the Theatricalist aesthetic. Welles made his name with unforgettable high points onstage: the mob's murder of Cinna the Poet in *Caesar*, the death of Macbeth in the Harlem production (1936), an actor's tumble into the orchestra pit in *Horse Eats Hat* (1936), the guillotine scenes in *Danton's Death* (1938), and the police agents firing from the audience in *Native Son* (1941). He became known as a director of thrilling moments, ever willing to sacrifice steady buildup to anything that would astonish.[37] Forties theater critics had a name for it: "Wellesapoppin'."[38]

Welles admitted he introduced shock effects into his moviemaking because he thought most films were dull.[39] *Citizen Kane* (1941) bombards the audience with harsh sound cuts and surprise transitions. *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948) is a cascade of set pieces, yanking us from giant aquariums to courtrooms resembling chessboards and then to a Crazy House and a shootout in a mirror maze. The jolts and bursts contrast with Hitchcock's commitment to rising tension. Hitchcock, with his love of "purely cinematic" storytelling through cutting and camera position, became an exemplar of vivid narrative continuity. Welles's sudden spikes and ragged editing worked against that tradition of smooth storytelling celebrated by Seldes and Ferguson.

Wellesian theatricality had a unique audacity, but his films, early and late, owed a lot to more mundane forties trends. He sometimes confined the story action to a day or two (*Othello*, 1955; *Touch of Evil*, 1958; the unfinished *The Deep* and *The Other Side of the Wind*). He joined the shift to location filming, by choice in *The Lady from Shanghai* and by necessity in his European films. He could manage both tightly restricted viewpoint (*The Trial*, 1962) and moving-spotlight omniscience (*Touch of Evil*). *Othello* offers a subtle variant, attaching us first to Iago, then to Othello as he carries out Iago's scheme, and finally crosscutting several lines of violent action at the climax. Recasting Shakespearean soliloquy as inner monologue for *Macbeth* (1948) was an obvious

switch, made by Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948) at the same time. So too were subjective passages in *Othello* (during the Moor's epileptic blackout) and *Macbeth* (the rack-focused dagger). *Mr. Arkadin* (1955) is built on an investigation plot, as is *The Stranger* (1946). Welles integrated the amnesia device into several uncompleted projects, and he gave it a new twist in *Arkadin* by making the amnesia a bluff.

By 1943, with the completion of *Journey into Fear* for RKO, Welles was finished as a contract director and had to generate one-off projects, either fringe studio pictures or overseas productions.[40] Unlike Hitchcock, he didn't face the problem of keen competitors, though his films' look was widely imitated. Welles popularized low-angle and deep-focus shot design, with big faces looming in the foreground, and a moderate version of this style became a norm for black-and-white drama from the 1940s through to the early 1960s.[41] You could argue that this mainstreaming of *Kane*'s signature imagery spurred Welles to explore even more baroque options in staging and shooting.

On the narrative side, though, he was free to compete only with himself. Having consolidated many current storytelling strategies in his forties work, he pushed them further across the next thirty years. Two of those strategies were identified with him: voice-over narration and embedded stories.

Hitchcock used dialogue sparingly, but Welles's films were verbose. Dialogue is almost constant, and often a voice, sometimes given an onscreen body, serves as a compère guiding us into or through the plot. The narrator becomes at once all-knowing and oddly human, speaking softly to the audience—Welles's "first-person singular" trademark. And once you launch into yarn spinning, you're tempted to back and fill, skip around in time, mimic the people whose conversations you report, and even digress to other stories. Flashbacks and embedded plots arise naturally out of oral storytelling.

Thanks to radio, Welles had been identified with the voice-over technique. His squeezed, clipped baritone introduces Gregory Arkadin's empty airplane, the parable of the Law that opens *The Trial*, and the central fable of *The Immortal Story* (1969). He planned the same sort of prelude for *Heart of Darkness*, *The*

Dreamers, and *The Other Side of the Wind*, while in *Don Quixote* he was to appear in his own persona recounting the tale to a little girl. Some release versions of *Macbeth* and *Othello* added his vocal introduction. For *Chimes at Midnight* (1965), the external narrator takes a different voice, that of Ralph Richardson. Most joltingly, in *Macbeth* the three witches function as a shrieking chorus, glimpsed vaguely in the frame or merely heard as cawing commentators on the hero's fate ("*Untimely ripp'd!*").

On film, Welles favored the external, noncharacter narrator. He reverted to his radio technique of making the protagonist the storyteller only when nervous producers wanted to clarify a choppy plot. Even then, Welles managed something fresh and disconcerting. *Journey into Fear*, signed by Norman Foster but designed and supervised by Welles, mocks a common motivation for character voice-over. An innocent businessman is plunged into international intrigue, and he narrates his adventures in an unseen letter to his wife. In the epilogue, we finally see him concluding the letter, but then he tears it up.

As for *The Lady from Shanghai*, if the purpose of the hero's voice-over (and Columbia's recutting) was to make the plot more lucid, the failure was striking. Three characters, each driven by self-interest, frame the sailor Michael O'Hara for murder, and the machinations that trap him are nearly as opaque to the audience as they are to him. The divergences from his range of knowledge aren't filled with clues about the antagonists' plans. (Compare *My Name Is Julia Ross*, which reveals the family's plot against the heroine bit by bit.) Further, the commentary doesn't mend the jumps in space and emotional tone, such as the bravura sequences of Michael's trial and the shootout in the mirror maze. O'Hara's reconstruction of the crime is given in voice-over during his wandering through the Crazy House. The viewer of this climactic scene could be forgiven for not paying attention to the rapidly recited backstory when confronted by a pageant of bizarre imagery (fig. HW.2).

No less eccentric is Welles's reuse of the "narratage" effect first seen in Sturges's *The Power and the Glory* (1933) and picked up in *The Gay Sisters* (1942) and a few other films. Here the narrator assumes the voice of the character we're watching. This ven-

HW.2. *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948): Instead of providing flashbacks and replays, Welles has O'Hara resolve the mystery in rapid voice-over. Meanwhile, the Theatricalist shock effect of the Crazy House imagery distracts us from crucial exposition.

triloquism is presented in a comic key in Welles's 1956 television pilot *Fountain of Youth*. His voice reads characters' lines, including those of a woman. In a later moment of equal-opportunity stylization, her voice takes over his.

Welles extended the principle to what we might call semi-hidden narratage. From *Othello* on, he dubbed the voices of many actors, sometimes barely disguising the fact. Simon Callow has argued that, at least in *Chimes at Midnight*, our recognition of Welles's all-controlling voice is part of the film's artistic effect, much in the way radio listeners could appreciate that he was playing multiple parts in "Dracula" or "A Tale of Two Cities."[42] For the unmade project *The Heroine*, Welles explained, "A lot of it is dubbed, in the respect that I speak for them. I'm sort of a storyteller in sync with their voices."[43] This practice is actualized in the final episode of *F for Fake* (1975) in which Welles both narrates the story of the Picasso forger and mimics the forger's voice.

Welles's delight in detaching sound from image, evident in his frequent efforts to prerecord dialogue for playback on the set, led him increasingly toward treating the two tracks as independent. Assembling shots with abandon, sometimes in defiance of pictorial continuity, then bringing them into alignment (more or less) with the freely mixed dialogue gave his later films a jagged audio-visual texture.[44] The tendency reaches a kind of climax in *F for Fake*, with its montage of documentary shots and flagrant reconstructions, the whole thing stuck together by frantic editing and Welles's ceaseless, digressive voice-over. The result is something like manically illustrated radio.

STORIES INSIDE STORIES

"This," intones the narrator of *The Trial*, "is a story inside a story." Such embedding became as much a Welles trademark as voice-over commentary. *Citizen Kane*'s multiple-flashback structure, though not unprecedented, made filmmakers aware of the power of swaddling one story within another. Sometimes Welles's use of the schema was fairly conventional, as in the script for *The Dreamers*, in which each man recounts his romance with a mysterious woman (those tales are in turn enclosed in one man's memory). But later films vary the pattern. *Mr. Arkadin* traces Guy Van Stratten's investigation of the mysterious mogul. The standard schema would show how Van Stratten's questioning leads each witness into a flashback illustrating an encounter with Arkadin. Instead, the flashbacks are recounted by Van Stratten himself, who explains his quest to the last witness he uncovers. It's as if the reporter Thompson were telling Kane's butler how he conducted his interviews.

Welles also inserted stories that were not actually flashbacks, as when he embeds a film within his film: the death-camp footage in *The Stranger*, and extracts from film director Jake Hannaford's work in progress in the course of *The Other Side of the Wind*. Somewhat odder is Welles's habit of beginning the film with a prologue showing incidents that will occur later in the plot. The clearest example comes in *Chimes at Midnight*, when Falstaff and Justice Shallow are seen hobbling through a snowy forest and then settling down at the hearth. "We have heard the chimes at midnight, Justice Shallow." In story chronology, this takes place near the climax, when Falstaff learns of King Henry's death. We might call the prologue a flashforward, or decide that everything that follows is a kind of flashback from that wintry moment, but in either possibility Welles doesn't mark the scene as a temporal displacement. It serves more to set the mood and introduce the major character.

Similar anticipatory stories occur in *The Trial*, when the opening animated parable is reenacted in the Advocate's slide show; in *Mr. Arkadin*, when Van Stratten's approach to Zouk's apartment is replayed in his account of his search; and most ominously in

the opening of *Othello*, where the gloomy majesty of converging funeral processions gives us the film's epilogue before we have the credits.

This sort of premonitory prologue may have its source in the original opening of *The Stranger*. That film was to begin with an eerie scene of the heroine rising from her bed, crossing the cemetery, and witnessing a struggle on the ledge of the bell tower. This might be a dream or vision or a flashforward, but the screenplay doesn't indicate which. At the climax, the scene was to be replayed, although crosscut with other lines of action. Unfortunately, this precredits prologue was cut out of the final version.[45] Soon other directors' films would use a jolting flashforward under the credits (*All the King's Men*, 1949) or before them (*The Sound of Fury*, 1951; *Red Ball Express*, 1952), but Welles's film would have presented something more lyrical and Lewtonesque, while identifying *The Stranger* firmly as a woman-in-peril thriller. And the film's final line—the government agent Wilson wishing the traumatized wife "pleasant dreams"—would have had an ironic bite.

One more film shows Welles recasting his pet schemas in a radical way. At a time when turn-of-the-century nostalgia sold, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) could have achieved conventional comfort by framing its family saga in the glow of remembrance. Eugene Morgan and Fanny Minafer could have been sitting in her rest home and recalling their youth in the manner of *Edison the Man* (1940), *Cheers for Miss Bishop* (1941), and *The Great Man's Lady* (1942). But the young flashback virtuoso refused flashbacks. Instead, he wove pastness into the very texture of his storytelling, and in the process he made nostalgia bitter.

How to evoke the past without a flashback? Most obviously, *Ambersons* gives us the voice-over narrator, whose affectionate, slightly satirical lament conjures up the old midwestern plutocracy. More subtly, *Ambersons* evokes silent cinema, with the vignettes and movie posters I've mentioned. At bottom, though, this film about old money giving way to new money, technology taking over lives, and industrialization destroying a courtly culture is inherently about past*ness*. It conveys a melancholy recognition that things are always changing, that we make sense of events only after it's too late to affect them. *Ambersons* is a film

centered on missed opportunities and what might have been. Eugene might have married Isabel Amberson if she weren't so proud, her son George might have reconciled himself to their later union if he weren't so bound by prejudice and arrogance, and Eugene might have married Fanny—if only he'd loved her.

Ambersons carries its sense of an unrecoverable past into every scene. After "the last of the great Amberson balls," the narrator's past-tense explanation withdraws for a considerable time. Instead, characters take up the burden of narrating what's gone by. "Eighteen years have passed," says Isabel's brother Jack at the ball. "Or have they?" Before Eugene dances off with Isabel, he remarks that the past is dead. Unfortunately, it won't stay buried. The old romance between Isabel and Eugene will be rekindled, and bad business decisions, social changes, and George's spendthrift ways will shatter the family.

Ellipses are crucial in evoking the past, distant or recent. The flow of scenes bypasses major story events—Wilbur's death, the decline of the family fortune, Gene's second courtship of Isabel, and Isabel's death. So much occurs offscreen that we must play catch-up. We must listen to characters report on what has just happened or reflect on the more distant past. The film is built on reaction and recollection. We don't see Fanny at Isabel's deathbed; she simply bursts out of the room to embrace her nephew: "She loved you, George!" We don't see George and Isabel on their European trip; we learn of it from the doleful Uncle Jack, who thinks that Isabel is falling sick. Jack's report allows him to voice his concern—he's probably the one Amberson whose judgments we trust—while Eugene displays helpless, rigid sorrow at the news.

One of *Ambersons*' most famous scenes, a long take in the mansion's kitchen, is characteristic. Under Fanny's questioning, George explains that Gene and Isabel were starting to reconcile at his college graduation. A nostalgia movie would have flashed back to that cheerful moment on the campus, but Welles channels the information through George's insensitive report and Fanny's uneasy probing. The scene climaxes with her breaking down in tears. As ever, melancholy wins out.

True, RKO chopped up the movie, but many gaps were built

into the screenplay. As each scene unfolds, we get news about what has happened since the last scene, or what happened years before. At the railroad station Uncle Jack, leaving town for good, recalls a woman he left there long ago. "Don't know where she lives now–or if she is living." The early stretches of the film become part of the characters' past, and our memory is folded into the reverie. "She probably imagines I'm still dancing in the ballroom of the Amberson mansion." At the limit, Major Amberson's muttered fireside musing takes us back to the origins of life: "The earth came out of the sun, and we came out of the earth." Now the past is primeval.

Ambersons absorbs the lessons of the well-crafted tales of Conrad and Henry James more thoroughly than in the rather literal to-camera project *Heart of Darkness*. A critic notes that in the first half of James's *The Golden Bowl*,

> the author has a trick of referring to the past with each new incident he introduces. We are invited to look back through the consciousness of one of the characters upon a *fait accompli*; or we learn of the fact through some dialogue in which the characters discuss the bearing of what has happened upon their present situation.[46]

In *Ambersons*, with everyone reporting action at one remove, "first-person singular" duties are spread out.[47] The very absence of the easy option, the framed and voiced flashback, along with the tactic of making every character a narrator, marks the film as Welles's effort to go beyond what he had accomplished in *Kane*—and what other directors were already busily borrowing.

The borrowing never stopped. Ever since *Kane*, we've had films that start out with newsreels, plots in which an investigator probes the past and triggers flashbacks, sound tracks with ironic voice-over commentators (*L.A. Confidential*, 1997; *The Big Lebowski*, 1998; *Magnolia*, 1999), and prologues providing teasing glimpses of story action to come. The Boy Wonder who brought a magician's eye to language and light left American cinema very different from the way he found it.

After 1939, Hitchcock made thirty features, Welles thirteen. The films they didn't make, the notes and scripts and anecdotes, are more captivating than nearly anything at our multiplex. Meanwhile, the finished works remain of commanding value. Hitchcock and Welles did more than change the cinema of the forties. They showed directors who came after them that forties innovations could be revised with unflagging ingenuity.

CONCLUSION

The Way Hollywood Keeps Telling It

Things're changing, Mac. They're thinking differently about stories nowadays.

Richard Brooks, *The Producer* (1951)[1]

MANY CINEPHILES LOVE THE STUDIO MOVIES OF THE 1920S; many more love those of the 1930s. Yet forties films engender perhaps the keenest affection of all. That's due to many factors, but part of their appeal, I've suggested throughout, stems from what Darryl Zanuck points out in this book's epigraph. In movie after movie, how the story is told is at least as intriguing and exhilarating as the story considered by itself.

How Green Was My Valley (1941) gains poignancy by being cast as a memory of childhood, and the emotion intensifies when at the end Huw's tale plunges back into memory and denies the hopeless present. *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) would not be so frightening were it restricted wholly to Uncle Charlie's viewpoint. Block construction built around seasons enhances the family crisis of *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), while misleading ellipses in *The Secret Beyond the Door* (1948) trigger disorienting shock. Disquieting glimpses of Daisy Kenyon's male friends when she's not present make their motives more opaque than we expect. Dead narrators in *The Human Comedy* (1943) and *The Seventh Cross* (1944) aren't

mere gimmicks; in different ways they intensify each film's emotional impact.

Because of this new boldness in presenting the *how* as well as the *what*, 1940s films reward revisiting. If my depth soundings throughout this book show anything, I hope they indicate how a great many movies achieve an evocative complexity seldom seen in earlier Hollywood projects. Critics who admire these films' intricacy make common cause with moviegoers who thrill to their power.

Writers and directors realized they could deepen storytelling options that hadn't yet become standardized. Once filmmakers had mastered sound technology and new genres, many saw widening prospects on the terrain of narrative. Some inspirations came from without: from mildly modernist best sellers like *Kitty Foyle* (1940) and Broadway plays like *Death of a Salesman* (1952), or from the demands of wartime filmmaking, like the pressure toward group protagonists in combat pictures. Other innovations sprang spontaneously from ambitious filmmakers like Hitchcock, Sturges, Welles, Lang, Mankiewicz, Selznick, Wallis, and Hecht. They sought creative challenges and wanted to distinguish their work from their peers' output.

The whole process was accelerated by the growing independence of key creators, by the dynamic of cooperative competition, and by the intensified public demand for movies during the Five Fat Years. Although that demand slackened after the war, the creative momentum didn't. In a waning market, individual pictures had to stand out boldly, so there was still pressure for innovation in story premises (for example, the psychiatricals) and storytelling methods, as the Oscars for *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949) and *All about Eve* (1950) showed. At lower budget levels, in genre pictures of all sorts, experiment continued even as theaters emptied. An unbroken impetus toward innovation encouraged byzantine flashbacks (e.g., *Beyond Glory*, 1948) and wild subjectivity (e.g., *Possessed*, 1947). Far-fetched variants became more common.

The innovations can be considered, from one angle, as cumulative. There aren't many 1940s narrative techniques that don't find some precedent, however sketchy, in earlier Hollywood. Yet

we're warranted in seeing the forties as a reinvention of cinematic storytelling. Between 1939 and 1952, Hollywood pushed its formally flamboyant side to a new level. Techniques glimpsed in the 1920s and 1930s—time-juggling, degrees of subjectivity, shifts among protagonists, block construction, efforts to confine the drama in space and time, the possibilities of fantasy and documentary realism, the charms of outright artifice, and duplicitous narration born of mystery mongering—all came to a kind of ripeness. They became more frequent, more varied, more complex, and more interdependent.

Variation is built into mass culture; the switcheroo is second nature to show business. Almost every strategy we can name branched out, in Jean-Claude Carrière's term, and revealed nuances and fresh possibilities within the premises of Hollywood dramaturgy. If most of these new conventions didn't break the mold, they did stretch tradition.

Someone might ask, If the dynamic of innovation consists of schema and revision, where does true originality come from? Is there no single work we can point to as the ultimate source of this or that new storytelling strategy? I'm inclined to say there is no such source. Artists working in mass art forms find originality by revising schemas in circulation, or by reviving ones that have fallen into disuse.

The Internet slogan that "everything is a mashup" suggests the hybridizing side of innovation, but even that doesn't fully capture the deeper dynamic at play. Exactly because the schema is a pattern, it can be unpredictably combined with other schemas and new subjects and themes. *Tales of Manhattan* (1942) stands out because its version of the circulating-object pattern gets filled with unusual material (the tailcoat) and combined with a thematic pattern, that of a progression across social classes. To take a more recent example, *Groundhog Day* (1993) is memorably original because it meshes a time-travel premise (going back to the past to correct a mistake) with the "day in the life" schema, then reiterates the pattern to fit an arc of character improvement.

I hope some qualifications and concessions have been evident all along, but just to be clear, many masterful movies, such as *Going My Way* (1944), *To Have and Have Not* (1945), and *My Darling*

Clementine (1946), weren't innovative along the dimensions I've been considering. And not everything of value in the era's films depends on narrative strategies. Hundreds of thrilling moments in forties films stem from splendid performances, directorial panache, and unforgettable dialogue ("Round up the usual suspects"; "I like talking to a man who likes to talk"; "Fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a bumpy night"). I've merely tried to activate one perspective on this era's remarkable cinematic legacy.

Similarly, I'm not saying that all innovative movies were particularly good. *Strange Illusion* (1945), *The Chase* (1946), *The Guilt of Janet Ames* (1947), and *Repeat Performance* (1947) are far from impeccable. But they become fascinating, surprising variants of changes that were rippling through Hollywood cinema. And they illustrate the process Carrière describes: filmmakers striving to go beyond innovations that had swiftly come to seem commonplace.

BORDER CROSSINGS

Concentrating on American studio cinema has allowed me little scope for considering its rivals. That's partly because most national film industries in Asia, Europe, and Latin America didn't enjoy a production boom comparable to Hollywood's. The war drastically curtailed output in many countries, and postwar recovery was slow. Nonetheless, there are intriguing parallels between the innovations I've been considering and what we occasionally find in foreign films of the period.

When we watch Jacques Feyder's Swiss project *A Woman Disappeared* (*Une femme disparaît*, 1942), it's hard not to notice its kinship with *Lydia* (1941). A woman has drowned, and three men come to claim the body. Flashbacks trace the men's relations to three different women, none of them the actual victim. As a fillip, the women are all played by the same actress.[2] This formal invention doesn't seem indebted to American sources. Nor does *Rashomon* (1950), with its conflicting pieces of eyewitness testimony, seem to have been influenced by *Crossfire* (1947); the latter wasn't seen in Japan for many years.[3] Evidently local circumstances elsewhere led to innovations resembling those found in Hollywood.

The United Kingdom in particular furnishes striking parallel examples. I've already suggested that films by Noël Coward and the Powell/Pressburger team were in harmony with Hollywood trends. The British thriller tradition, out of which Hitchcock developed, continued in ways congruent with American developments, from *The Girl in the News* (1940), with its shrewdly fluctuating viewpoint between innocent woman and scheming killer, to *Dear Murderer* (1947), which includes a lying flashback that probably would have been known to Hitchcock before he made *Stage Fright* (1950).

Influences likely ran in both directions. The much-praised UK film *In Which We Serve* (1942), with a block structure modeled on *Citizen Kane*, starts with a crisis and then launches explanatory flashbacks.[4] *Mine Own Executioner* (1948) owes a good deal to the US psychoanalytical cycle, while the fantasy *Dead of Night* (1945) is a clever episodic block exercise. The remarkable *On Approval* (1944) includes a very active voice-over commentator, a framing situation, to-camera address, and a climactic dream shared by two characters. The entirety of *The Woman in Question* (1950) is built around around contradictory replays of witnesses' testimony during a murder investigation.

In general, it's hard to know how much these similarities owe to transatlantic influence and how much to simple convergence of interests. Finer-grained research could sort out the various factors that brought American and British cinema into fruitful exchange over these years.

Elsewhere, it seems likely that the influence of American films encouraged newly self-conscious storytelling. The Mexican melodrama *In the Palm of Your Hand* (*En la palma de tu mano*, 1951) has a James M. Cain–inflected plot, with flashbacks, inner monologues, subjective hallucinations, and auditory flashbacks coming from two characters, one of them dead. The Danish film *Eight Chords* (*Otte akkorder*, 1944), centering on a circulating phonograph record that ties together eight story lines, was based on *Tales of Manhattan* (1942). The filmmaker hadn't seen the original; merely reading about it inspired him to try out the plot schema.[5]

Hollywood films flooded postwar Europe, and film culture was naturally affected. By 1948 West German theaters had

screened nearly 120 of the studios' wartime releases.[6] During the 1950s and 1960s, a younger generation of German viewers found that forties American films offered an alternative to the staid "Papa's Kino" of the local industry.[7] For example, Rainer Werner Fassbinder defended Michael Curtiz as an important director; historian Eric Rentschler has suggested that *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979) is strongly indebted to *Mildred Pierce* (1945).[8] Fassbinder derived the perverse woman-in-peril plot of *Martha* (1974) from a Cornell Woolrich story, and the film has affinities with *Gaslight* (1944) as well.

In the sixties German cinephiles were catching up with French critics who had in the forties sensed the changes in Hollywood form and style. Alexandre Astruc and André Bazin saw the films as pioneering a new age of cinematic expression.[9] Stimulated by the narrative strategies on display in 1940s releases, Claude-Edmonde Magny's 1948 book *The Age of the American Novel* analyzed the interaction between American cinema and modern fiction.[10] Although Jean-Paul Sartre famously attacked *Citizen Kane* for its effort to tell a story in the past tense,[11] he didn't dissuade critics who found it stimulating. And returning émigrés brought along schemas that had proved their worth in America. Max Ophüls's *La ronde* (1950) was a variant of the circulating-object narrative, while *Le plaisir* (1952) helped fuel the new European trend toward anthology films. Julien Duvivier, who had given Hollywood *Lydia* (1941), *Tales of Manhattan* (1942), and *Flesh and Fantasy* (1943), gave France the thriller *Panique* (1947) and *Sous le ciel de Paris* (1951), a very elaborate network narrative. His *La fête à Henriette* (1952) pushes the film-within-a-film device to a new limit: two quarreling writers keep revising their screenplay, with contradictory results played out before us.

Meanwhile, the "Young Turks" of *Cahiers du Cinéma* recognized immense creative verve across the seas. "For the talented and dedicated filmmaker," wrote Éric Rohmer, "the California coast is not that den of iniquity that some would have us believe. It is rather that chosen land, that haven which Florence was for painters of the Quattrocento or Vienna for musicians in the nineteenth century."[12] Unsurprisingly, when the critics turned to directing, they revised some forties techniques. François Truffaut's

Shoot the Piano Player (1960) plays with external voice-over, and the opening of Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1960) oscillates between Michel's dialogue and what may be inner monologue. Throughout his career, Godard would drastically rework the possibilities of nonchronological plotting, voice-over commentary, multiple-protagonist tales, and block construction. Jacques Demy's exuberant *Demoiselles de Rochefort* (1967), revisiting the MGM on-location musical, multiplies romantic story lines profusely: three women deciding among five men, with a serial killer tossed in for flavor.

Rohmer noted that "it is to the thriller that the American cinema owes the best of its inspirations."[13] Director Jean-Pierre Melville, a keen admirer of American movies, built his later career on that supreme genre of viewer-friendly narrative trickery. *Bob le flambeur* (1956) offers an imaginative reworking of the robbery-rehearsal convention of the heist film: an external voice-over narrator introduces a hypothetical sequence showing how the gang's scheme is intended to come off. *Le doulos* (1962) misleads us with an ellipsis Fritz Lang might have admired.[14]

The French directors who grew up on the American thriller turned to the genre often. Truffaut's two Woolrich adaptations, *The Bride Wore Black* (1968) and *Mississippi Mermaid* (1969), as well as his *Confidentially Yours* (*Vivement dimanche!*, 1983), depend on manipulations of viewpoint characteristic of 1940s Hollywood in general and Hitchcock in particular.[15] Claude Chabrol was coauthor of a book on Hitchcock and plunged into making thrillers, including adaptations of Patricia Highsmith and Charlotte Armstrong. Godard dedicated his man-on-the-run movie *Breathless* to Monogram studios, and he derived *Le petit soldat* (1960) from *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948).[16] For decades afterward he would creatively warp forties crime picture motifs.

Truffaut noted that his generation's reaction to hard-boiled fiction was shaped by the sort of exchange between popular publishing and studio filmmaking we've seen throughout this book.

> The cinephiles of my generation knew [Woolrich] before they had read a single line of his, because many of his novels and short stories were the basis of the bizarre and fascinating films

of the forties and fifties, such as Jacques Tourneur's *The Leopard Man*, Robert Siodmak's *Phantom Lady*, Roy William Neil's *Black Angel*, John Farrow's *Night Has a Thousand Eyes*, Ted Tetzlaff's *The Window*, and especially one of the best if not the best Hitchcock film, *Rear Window*.[17]

The feedback loop was even tighter than Truffaut suggests. The publisher of the Série noire collection announced that his translations of hard-boiled American writers would capture the cool objectivity of "good films."[18] The French source novels for *Les diaboliques* (1955) and *Vertigo* (1958) were indebted to Hollywood movies. From films to novels back to films: the multimedia swap meet was bustling in France as well as America.

ZANUCK'S GHOST

In March 1952 *Variety* ran a story called "H'wood's 'Offbeat' Prod. Trend."[19] The story confirms Hollywood's persisting interest in innovation, and the projects mentioned rely on schema and revision, and often the old switcheroo.

Invitation to the Dance (not released until 1956) was built out of three long dance segments, offering a new instance of block construction. In *The Story of Three Loves* (1953), passengers on an ocean liner recall their pasts in flashback. Since the passengers' lives don't intertwine, in effect we're back with *Flesh and Fantasy* (1943). *The Four Poster* (1952) featured only two characters, a husband and wife, and traced their marriage across decades. Another example of self-consciously theatrical cinema, the film respected the original play's combination of block construction, family saga, and confinement to the couple's bedroom. The film added cartoon sequences between the acts and drew on another forties convention by showing the couple reuniting in the afterlife. Perhaps most unusual in *Variety*'s batch was *The Thief* (1952). As if in rebellion against voice-over narration, this man-on-the-run spy drama contains no speech at all. The generic situations are garnished with location sequences in Manhattan and Washington, DC, personalized montages, a dream sequence, and giddy POV shots from the top of the Empire State Building.

Today's equivalents of the 1952 *Variety* article are the infotainment puff pieces marketing new storytelling tricks. We're used to learning that a new release will limit itself in locale (*Room*, 2015) or time (*Gravity*, 2013) or both (*The Hateful Eight*, 2015). We learn that a festival hit will be structured around a character's viewpoint, or maybe two (*The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby: Her/Him*, 2013). A film will play out wholly on a computer screen (*Unfriended*, 2015) or on cameras wielded by the characters (the *Paranormal Activity* series). A plot can show characters rewriting their pasts (*Project Almanac*, 2015) or branching into alternative futures (*Source Code*, 2011). Television has joined this trend. Now an entire series can be built on rigorous narrative premises, from *24* and *How I Met Your Mother* to *The Slap*, each episode of which presents a different character's viewpoint on a central turning point.[20] Form, some would say, is the new content, as well as a hip promotional strategy.

Somewhere Zanuck is sporting his gap-toothed grin. The how of storytelling has triumphantly become at least as important as the what. *Short Cuts* (1993), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Magnolia* (1999), and *Memento* (2001) became modern classics partly by virtue of recasting narrative strategies that coalesced in the 1940s.[21] Directors have gained fame for their risky efforts. Quentin Tarantino has specialized in revamping block construction, while Steven Soderbergh has revived multiple-protagonist plots in *Traffic* (2001) and *Contagion* (2011).[22] Without the time-shifting trends of the forties, we'd be unlikely to have the melting wraparound visions of the whistle-blowing executive in *The Insider* (1999) and the interwoven flashbacks framed by depositions in *The Social Network* (2010).

Almost any movie we watch today is likely to mingle voice-overs, shuffle events out of order, and inject dreams and fantasy sequences. Films as different as *The Hangover* (2009) and *Ben-Hur* (2016) resort to layers of embedded flashbacks. The delirious montages of *Blues in the Night* (1941) have their descendants in the turbo-speed hallucinations of the protagonist of *Limitless* (2011). The arthouse release *Indignation* (2016) goes beyond its source novel by encasing its central action in two frame stories and teasing us with an enigmatic opening that is replayed at the

climax—the whole supervised by an apparently dead narrator.[23] We meet the forties Hollywood aesthetic nearly every time we visit the multiplex or click through our Netflix queue.[24]

These movies are feeding on each other, but as ever some find inspiration in other media. Middlebrow modernism continues to flourish in novels that make their way to our screens. *The English Patient*, *One Day*, *Fight Club*, and many other works of fiction have goaded filmmakers into narrative complexity. Similarly, the plotting and narration in our literary thrillers entrap us in ways faithful to the forties. An action picture rendered entirely in optical POV (*Hardcore Henry*, 2016) can owe a debt not only to *The Lady in the Lake* (1947) but to first-person shooter video games.

How did we get here? Explaining that would require a book in itself, but let me sketch an outline.

The narrative explorations I've been charting didn't halt abruptly after my period boundary of 1952, of course, any more than they sprang up in 1940. It's not surprising, for instance, to find that the flashbacks of *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1953) reviewed recent Hollywood history, with insider references to Hitchcock, Lang, and old MGM and RKO pictures.[25] *The I Don't Care Girl* (1953) presented a show-biz *Rashomon*, as three men offer incompatible versions of a star's rise to fame. If *The First Time* (1952) can be recounted by a newborn baby, why shouldn't the narrator of *Susan Slept Here* (1954) be an Oscar statuette? The indefatigable Vera Caspary, after *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949) and *Three Husbands* (1950), tried the triplicate flashback format again in *Les Girls* (1957), adding the conventional trial situation to frame it. Again, adaptation pressed filmmakers to adjust. Live television production limited *Twelve Angry Men* to a jury room, a confinement respected in the 1957 film. For its racetrack heist, *The Killing* (1955) borrowed from its source novel the strategy of shuttling among viewpoints and across time periods, guided by a Voice of God narrator.

It seems, though, that a truly sustained burst of narrative innovation had to wait a bit. My hunch is that the elevation of biblical spectacles and big Broadway musicals through the 1950s and early 1960s discouraged complex storytelling strategies. Eventually, though, younger American filmmakers became drawn to the

fragmentary forms on display in the European art film, from Alain Resnais to Bernardo Bertolucci.[26] Among the off-Hollywood results were *The Pawnbroker* (1964), *The Graduate* (1967), *Point Blank* (1967), *Petulia* (1968), *Easy Rider* (1969), and *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1969). By the 1970s we got drifting heroes, frayed causal chains, and open endings. We also got plunges into subjectivity (*Images*, 1972) and new versions of the Grand Hotel template (*Nashville*, 1975; *Car Wash*, 1976).

Just as 1940s filmmakers developed options sketched in the previous decade, so later filmmakers could expand options only hinted at in the forties. The flashforward, for example, became a full-blown option in the 1960s through schema and revision: instead of plugging in a vision of the past, the filmmaker inserts a glimpse of the future. The flashforward was a switch on the flashback. As we've seen, the device was sketchily anticipated by the opening portions of *The Great Moment* (1944), *All the King's Men* (1950), and *The Sound of Fury* (1951), which tease the viewer with bits of upcoming plot action.

The process was a roundabout one, I think. The New Hollywood came to its "modernism" chiefly not through absorption of prewar High Modernist literature but through directors' encounters with postwar European modernist cinema. That European trend was in turn indebted to forties innovations. The fragmentary flashbacks of *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) benefited from the time-shifting so prominent a decade earlier. Could Resnais have conceived the anticipatory voice-over in *La guerre est finie* (1966) before inner monologues in the present and past tenses became conventional?[27] Foreign filmmakers boldly revised Hollywood schemas, and younger American filmmakers went on to revise—some would say domesticate and simplify—those revisions.

If sixties and seventies filmmakers were recasting the narrative strategies of classical Hollywood, and the forties in particular, they were also ramping up new genres and resurrecting older ones. The rise of science fiction and fantasy adventure in the 1970s built on the world-making rehearsed in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *The Blue Bird* (1940). Distinctive fictional realms with their own special rules would become a hallmark of contemporary Hollywood after *Star Wars* (1977) and continuing through the

Lord of the Rings films and today's franchise "universes" drawn from superhero comics. In *Inception* (2010) esoteric special rules, sprayed out in bursts of exposition, motivate not only action scenes but flashbacks, replays, and dreams within dreams within dreams.[28]

Less ponderous were the supernatural dramas, romances, and comedies that built on forties fantasies. Angels and spooks haunt *Kiss Me Goodbye* (1982), *Ghostbusters (*1984), *Field of Dreams* (1989), *Beetlejuice* (1989), *Ghost* (1990), and *Truly, Madly, Deeply* (1990). Some 1940s fantasies were remade: *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* became *Heaven Can Wait* (1978), *A Guy Named Joe* became *Always* (1989), and *The Bishop's Wife* became *The Preacher's Wife* (1996). What fans now call "paranormal romance," seen in *Portrait of Jennie* (1949) and other classics, continued in *Just Like Heaven* (2005), *The Lake House* (2006), and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008).[29] The spate of body swapping movies of the 1980s and 1990s become variants of the husband/wife exchange in *Turnabout* (1940).

The recycling of schemas was constant. *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972) and other disaster films revisited the Grand Hotel format, adding the pressure of a life-or-death deadline. If *American Graffiti* (1974) was a souped-up version of *Grand Hotel* on wheels, *Dazed and Confused* (1993) revised that revision. Remakes display the switcheroo aesthetic at its most blatant, with *The Shop around the Corner* (1940) redone as *You've Got Mail* (1998); it had already been switched into a musical mode for *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949).

The multiple-protagonist convention of the war film was embraced in many mission-team films such as *The Guns of Navarone* (1961) and *Where Eagles Dare* (1969). *The Thin Red Line* (1998) went further, employing loosely attached flashbacks, floating voice-overs, and nearly indistinguishable actors to build a sense of collective response to combat. *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) employs omniscient narration to juxtapose two missions that intersect, unaware of each other. The revelatory replay, given full expression in the forties, has become a staple of contemporary dramas. An incident is multiplied and paused through repetitions within the story world (recorded on film, videotape, digital dis-

plays) or in the overarching narration (as when we return obsessively to a piece of action and see it in a new light).

The 1940s crystallized techniques of stylized, self-conscious narration, and they resurged in the 1990s and 2000s. "So I'm dead," announces the protagonist of *Confidence* (2003), apparently mimicking Joe Gillis in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950); but he's a con artist and may not be reliable. In our films intertitles comment on the action, characters address the camera, and reflexivity can pop up anywhere. The protagonist of *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) talks as freely to the viewer as does the family friend in *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1948). *The Big Short* (2015) blasts out a fusillade of schemas from seventy years before—multiple protagonists, dispersed voice-overs, scattershot flashbacks, and to-camera commentary recast as minilectures on Wall Street swindles.

The mystery film is a privileged site of these strategies. Modern thrillers have found innumerable ways to mislead the viewer, as is seen in *Jacob's Ladder* (1990), *The Usual Suspects* (1995), *Fight Club* (1999), *Memento* (2001), *The Others* (2001), *Identity* (2003), *Saw* (2004), *The Prestige* (2005), *Shutter Island* (2010), and many more.[30] The thriller flourishes in a variorum milieu, and it has become a major source of narrative experimentation.

Take the standard pattern of crime/investigation. The schema is weighted toward flashback construction, alternating the investigation in the present with the lead-up to the crime in the past. So the first half of *Gone Girl* (2014) intercuts the police inquiry and the desperate evasions of their suspect with flashbacks tracing the circumstances of his wife's disappearance. But instead of being testimony from witnesses, the flashbacks are addressed to us and presented as the wife's diary entries. (They're also, we learn, untrustworthy.)[31] *Inside Man* (2006) flips the alternation schema by letting the crime, not the inquiry, serve as the present-time frame. A bank heist is interrupted by flashforwards showing the police investigating after the fact. These inject a new mystery: Which of the survivors are the robbers? Such narrational switches are indebted to the time shifts, cunning ellipses, replays, and moving-spotlight suppression developed by Hitchcock, Lang, and their contemporaries.

C.1. *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007): Streaky flashback imagery suggests muddled memory. As with *Clay Pigeon* and *Black Angel* (pp. 292–93), distorted imagery arouses sympathy for the protagonist, who's recovering from—what else?—amnesia.

Filmmakers outside America are still exploring forties schemas. Wong Kar-wai revels in parallel protagonists and drifting voice-overs (*The Grandmaster*, 2013), while the Romanian film *Sieranevada* (2016) is a nearly three-hour Grand Hotel immersion in family interactions. Both Pedro Almodóvar's *Julieta* (2016) and Park Chan-wook's *The Handmaiden* (2016) depend on block construction, replayed flashbacks, and viewpoint shifts. Today's global communication networks allow narrative strategies to migrate and mutate swiftly. The syntax of 1940s Hollywood remains basic to modern moviemaking.

REVISING THE RULES, TRAINING THE VIEWER

> I think that an audience develops along with everything else in the world. The telephone today is different from the instrument of ten years ago. The automobile is. The radio is. Writing develops, directing develops, cameras and light develop and yes, by golly, story-telling develops. Why should we assume that the audience does not develop?
>
> Garson Kanin, 1940[32]

In popular cinema, novelty needs constraints, and chief among them is the demand for clarity. A forties flashback would be signaled by a dissolve, a track-in, some dialogue cues, and perhaps a musical score. Today this looks pretty redundant. Over the years, cuts replaced the dissolve, track-ins became optional, and we might not be prompted by dialogue or music. But we need *some* cues. In a current film a sound from the past might overlap an image in the present, or a change from full color to a limited palette might signal the shift. Even a hip thriller, celebrated for its boldly disjointed camera technique, needs to flag its flashbacks unequivocally (fig. C.1).

C.2–C.5. *Out of Sight* (1998).

What helps achieve clarity is the underlying schema; if we know that, we can "read through" unexpected aspects of the film's texture. Take a brief passage in *Out of Sight* (1998). Jack Foley, bank robber, is on the run after tunneling out of prison. In a motel he takes a bath to clean up. As he turns on the faucet, federal agent Karen Sisco, who has earlier spent an awkwardly intimate time in a car trunk with Foley, creeps into his room, pistol in hand. She approaches the tub (figs. C.2 and C.3). As she stands over him, he seizes her gun arm. But instead of wrestling for the pistol, the two begin kissing, and she slips into the tub with him (fig. C.4).

We hear a man's voice say, "Karen," and a cut takes us to a hospital bed. Karen opens her eyes to face her father (fig. C.5). She's in the hospital because of the earlier dustup with Foley and his partners. She has dreamed the bathtub lovemaking. As in forties films, the dream shows something the character hasn't admitted to herself: she's attracted to this handsome, not overbright thief.

The dream sequence revises a familiar schema by omitting a piece of the pattern. We weren't shown Karen going to sleep, or even being brought to the hospital. Films like *The Woman in the Window* (1944) prepare for a dream situation a little more explicitly, but by the 1990s *Out of Sight* could entirely omit a front-end

C.6–C.7.

frame for Karen's dream. The film wants us to be surprised, but also to quickly understand that the sequence is a fantasy.

Out of Sight's scene exploits our assumptions about continuity; there's even a dialogue hook setting up Foley's running his bath. What makes the narration especially sneaky is that the first shots show Foley arriving before we discover Karen on the scene (figs. C.6 and C.7). The situation seems objective because it isn't initially restricted to her (although it becomes so once she enters the motel room and POV shots reveal Foley in the tub). To complicate things, we later learn that Foley and his pal really are in the motel that Karen imagined. We have something like *The Chase* (1946), in which the dream shows story-world locations that the dreamer could not know of. By the time we register the disparity, though, the narration and story action have moved on, and only pedants will worry. Hollywood is ultimately committed to effects yielded by form, not realism.

Revising a schema can, we've seen again and again, yield a bonus. When Karen wakes up, her father reports that she said "Hey yourself" in her sleep. We realize this was a response to Foley's "Hey" from the tub, and her bantering reply reaffirms her flirtatious interest in him. But in the dream we've seen, she *didn't* reply to Foley's "Hey." That omission encourages us to wonder if we've seen only one variant of her fantasy. Perhaps she dreamed the bathtub tryst over and over? Call it supersubtle, but that tweak seems to me to enrich the dream schema in much the same way that the toothpaste tube and home buyer's ad in *Wing and a Prayer* expand the moment of packing up aviator White's belongings in *Wings*.

Early in its life a technique may take getting used to. 1930s

critics seemed to worry that viewers would have trouble grasping flashbacks in trial movies as enactments of testimony. A decade later, the screenplay of *The Fallen Sparrow* (1943) flags each stretch of inner monologue with the note "Kit's lips do not move," as if the device was novel for studio personnel as well as viewers. Fortunately, spectators can grasp a new device partly because a narrative schema stands apart from the film's surface texture. A flashback's rearrangement of time can be made comprehensible without traditional punctuation.

By and large, redundancy is a help, not a fault. The protagonist of *The Fallen Sparrow* is introduced alone (so that the voice we hear can't belong to somebody offscreen) and he's staring at his reflection in a window (reinforcing the idea that he's addressing himself, a bit the way Kitty Foyle quarrels with Mirror Kitty). Abrupt as our *Out of Sight* scene is, it contains similar repetitions. The dream's action is implausible to begin with, and its imaginary status is confirmed when Karen's father says she was asleep. As storytelling options branch out, filmmakers must make the novelty at once unexpected and understandable. Judicious redundancy helps audiences cultivate new skills of comprehension.

It's common to speak of the fresh impulses of 1970s American commercial filmmaking as signaling a "New Hollywood." But the 1940s constituted the first New Hollywood. Then, as in the early 1970s, moviegoing revived after a fallow period. Blockbusters like *Gone with the Wind* (1940) gave the industry a new centrality in popular culture, as *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Exorcist* (1973) would do later. A host of young filmmakers appeared, many destined to have long careers. Producers, directors, writers, and actors gained new freedom. Many films became permanent classics; in popular memory, the great films of the 1970s seem to be rivaled only by those of the 1940s.[33] In both eras, as Richard Brooks's protagonist in *The Producer* puts it, people started to "think differently about stories."

Not completely differently, I admit. Forties filmmakers mostly adhered to the broad basic norms laid down by their predecessors: goal-oriented protagonists, four-part structure, double plotlines, scenic continuity and cohesion, hooks, interwoven motifs,

the pressure of appointments and deadlines. At the same time, though, in an outpouring of creative energy, filmmakers gave themselves over to new narrative methods.

Sometimes the results were too pedestrian or too peculiar. But often they led to invigorating ways of structuring plots, channeling information, probing characters' minds, and moving audiences. Across a few years and scores of films, inspired by earlier examples as well as by models in adjacent media, filmmakers rethought the art of telling stories in images and sounds. They stretched the horizons of cinema for all those who followed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS BOOK BEGAN AS A SERIES OF LECTURES FOR THE 2011 Summer Film College sponsored by the Flemish Service for Film Culture of Belgium, in partnership with the national film archive, the Cinematek. (For background, see http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2013/03/28/the-1940s-mon-amour/.) So I thank Gabrielle Claes, Nicola Mazzanti, Stef Franck, Bart Versteirt, Tom Paulus, Anke Brouwers, Steven Jacobs, and their colleagues for their friendship and support. Thanks as well to the many engaging participants in the College. In addition, I'm grateful to the students in a 2013 University of Wisconsin—Madison seminar on 1940s cinema; their research projects and comments in discussion stimulated me to think in new directions.

Over many years, I've been lucky to have the assistance of a squadron of friends and fellow researchers. These people supplied information and ideas that enriched my project. Thanks to Tino Balio, Fina Bathrick, Maria Belodubrovskaya, Schawn Belston, Ben Brewster, Marilyn Campbell, Michael Campi, Jared Case, Paolo Cherchi Usai, Eric Dienstfrey, Stefan Drössler, Chris Fujiwara, Geoff Gardner, Gary Giddins, Sid Gottlieb, Haden Guest, Kevin Hagopian, Jim Healy, Doug Holm, Eric Hoyt, Lea Jacobs, Kent Jones, Kay Kalinak, Mike King, Hiroshi Kitamura, David Koepp, Peter Labuza, Miriam Landwehr, Bill Luhr, Charles

Maland, Joseph McBride, Patrick McGilligan, David Meeker, Christophe Michel, Geoffrey O'Brien, Michael Pogorzelski, Dana Polan, Tony Rayns, Eric Rentschler, Phil Rosen, Brad Schauer, Janet Staiger, Maureen Turim, Casper Tybjerg, Shawn Vancour, Neil Verma, and Diane Waldman.

In particular, I'm indebted to Jim Naremore, Jeff Smith, and Malcolm Turvey for detailed comments on earlier versions of the book. They offered excellent suggestions for improvement and saved me from some real howlers.

Institutions that assisted me include the archive of the Cinematek of Brussels, and Francis Malfliet and his colleagues there; the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, and Steve Wilson there; the University of Wisconsin—Madison Center for Film and Theater Research, and Maxine Fleckner Ducey, Mary Huelsbek, and Amy Sloper there; the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress, and Mike Mashon and Dorinda Hartman there; the Wisconsin Historical Society; and the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts of New York City.

At the University of Chicago Press, Rodney Powell, a devoted cinephile and an expert on many arts, proved to be my ideal editor. Kelly Finefrock-Creed expertly oversaw the production process, and Alice Bennett's superb copyediting improved both the style and the accuracy of the book.

In an earlier book I paid tribute to Warren Lieberfarb, the visionary Warners executive behind the DVD format. Once more I feel obligated to him for making films in good video quality available to a wide audience. This time I want to add my thanks to Turner Classic Movies, which broadcasts hundreds of scarce titles, and to the online entrepreneurs who provide collectors with disc versions that studios have not released.

As ever, my deepest gratitude goes to Kristin Thompson. She read and criticized the whole manuscript twice. Let that sink in. She also sustained me through bumpy travels, health problems, and long nights of viewing. She makes even mediocre movies fun.

NOTES

THE LITERATURE ON 1940S HOLLYWOOD IS SO VAST THAT TO cite all the broadly relevant studies—all the film analyses, accounts of the industry, and biographical works—would require another book. I've accordingly been draconian in referencing only those secondary works that bear on particular points.

The epigraph to this book comes from *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck: The Golden Years at Twentieth Century-Fox*, ed. Rudy Behlmer (New York: Grove, 1993), 123.

INTRODUCTION

1. Leo C. Rosten, Hollywood: *The Movie Colony, the Movie Makers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1941), 26.

2. Ken Englund, "Quick! Boil Some Hot Clichés," *Screen Writer* 3, no. 9 (February 1948): 8.

3. Examples are Madeleine Doran, *Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1954); Richard Levin, *The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); and Robert D. Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

4. For example, Wheeler Winston Dixon writes: "The American imagination had gone through a series of intense psychic shocks, from the rise of Hitler and the Axis powers in Europe to the violent and protracted struggle for victory. But for many, the victory rang hollow." The footage of the German death camps "became indelibly marked on the American consciousness" ("Introduction," in

American Cinema of the 1940s [Oxford: Berg, 2006], 8). It's not explained how a researcher today gains access to the forties American imagination and the American consciousness. And are those the same thing? Do all Americans share the same imagination and awareness? Nor do we get an account of the process by which these states of mind work their way into films.

Other studies of the period in the reflectionist vein are Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, *Movies: A Psychological Study* (1950; New York: Atheneum, 1970), and Barbara Deming, *Running Away from Myself: A Dream Portrait of America Drawn from the Films of the 40's* (New York: Grossman, 1969).

5. See in particular Bernard F. Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985); Dana Polan, *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York: Free Press, 1987); and Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

6. See John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 37, 55. Mark Harris has suggested that bureaucratic squabbles stalled the emergence of firm policies, so Hollywood was given great freedom in ways of representing the war. See Mark Harris, *Five Came Back: A Story of Hollywood and the Second World War* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 140, 160–63, 207, 226.

7. For more extensive argument see my *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 30–32, and my blog entry "Zip, Zero, Zeitgeist" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2014/08/24/zip-zero-zeitgeist/.

8. See Alan Hunt, "Anxiety and Social Explanation: Some Anxieties about Anxiety," *Journal of Social History* 32, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 509–28.

9. On this trend, see my *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 73–76, and chapter 2 of my *The Rhapsodes: How 1940s Critics Changed American Film Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

10. "Notes on Movies and Reviewing to Jean Kintner for Museum of Modern Art Round Table (1949)," in James Agee, *Complete Film Criticism: Reviews, Essays, and Manuscripts*, ed. Charles Maland (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2017), 975.

11. In 1947, for example, producer John Houseman noted that "the 'tough' movie, currently projected on the seventeen thousand screens of this country, presents a fairly accurate reflection of the neurotic personality of the United States of America in the year 1947." See "Today's Hero: A Review," in *Hollywood Quarterly: Film Culture in Postwar America, 1945–1957* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 259.

12. Richard Schickel, *Good Morning Mr. Zip Zip Zip: Movies, Memory, and World War II* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003), 247.

13. Figures on amnesia in American cinema are drawn from a search of that subject heading in the *American Film Institute Catalog of Feature Films* online at http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/.

14. Jonathan Lethem's introduction to *The Vintage Book of Amnesia: An Anthology* (New York: Vintage, 2000) begins: "Real, diagnosable amnesia—people getting knocked on the head and forgetting their names—is mostly just a rumor in the world. It's a rare condition and usually a brief one" (xiii).

15. See Sallie Baxendale, "Memories Aren't Made of This: Amnesia at the Movies," *British Medical Journal*, 18 December 2004, 1480–83; available at http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC535990/.

16. Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folk-Tales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), 2:353–56.

17. See Sebastien Dieguez and Jean-Marie Annoni, "Stranger Than Fiction: Literary and Clinical Amnesia," in *Literary Medicine: Brain Disease and Doctors in Novels, Theater, and Film*, ed. Julien Bogousslavsky and Sebastien Dieguez (Basel: Karger, 2013), 137–68.

18. George E. Phair, "Retakes," *Daily Variety*, 9 February 1943, 2.

19. "*Street of Memories*," *Variety*, 3 July 1940, 18. See also "*I Love You Again*," *Daily Variety*, 6 August 1940, 3; "*Kisses for Breakfast*," *Variety*, 23 July 1941, 30.

20. "*Love Letters*," *Daily Variety*, 20 August 1945, 3.

21. "*I Love You Again*," *Variety*, 7 August 1940, 14.

22. Gilbert Seldes, *The Seven Lively Arts* (New York: Harper's, 1924), 13–14.

23. Gilbert Seldes, *The Movies Come from America* (New York: Scribner's, 1937), 53.

24. Otis Ferguson, "Mysteries and Medicals" (16 May 1934), in *The Film Criticism of Otis Ferguson*, ed. Robert Wilson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1971), 39.

25. Seldes, *Movies Come from America*, 9.

26. For discussion of the scene, see my blog entry "How to Tell a Movie Story: Mr. Stahr Will See You Now" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2014/01/05/how-to-tell-a-movie-story-mr-stahr-will-see-you-now/.

27. Francis Marion, *How to Write and Sell Film Stories* (New York: Covici-Friede, 1937).

28. Tamar Lane, *The New Technique of Screen Writing: A Practical Guide to the Writing and Marketing of Photoplays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936).

29. "Year's Film Technical Advances," *Daily Variety*, 24 October 1938, 112; "New Sound Methods Revealed in Film Engineers' Session," *Hollywood Reporter*, 20 April 1939, 14; "Notable Technical Advances in Film Production," *Daily Variety*, 30 October 1939, 229; Walter R. Greene, "Films' Technical Advances," *Variety*, 3 January 1940, 37; "New Stars, Grosses, Oscars," *Daily Variety*, 29 October 1941, 103.

30. André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," in Bazin,

What Is Cinema?, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 30.

31. See my *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 14–15.

32. *The Best Pictures 1939–1940 and the Year Book of Motion Pictures in America*, ed. Jerry Wald and Richard Macaulay (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1940), 291; Frank Fiske, "Hold Them Horses, Boys," *Daily Variety*, 14 October 1946, 11; "Cowpokes Ride Thisaway and Thataway," *Daily Variety*, 7 November 1949, 98.

33. "Comedy Goes Hey! Hey!" *Daily Variety*, 19 October 1942, 22.

34. Richard Mealand, "Watching the Trends Go By," *Hollywood Reporter*, 5 November 1945, n.p.

35. Frank Fiske, "The Good Old Days," *Daily Variety* 20 October 1947, 256.

36. "Studios Have Mastered 'Know How' of Film Musicals," *Daily Variety*, 19 October 1942, 39.

37. See Louis Berg, "Hollywood's Secret Weapon," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 September 1950, 67.

38. Whitney Williams, " 'Exploitation Pictures' Paid off Big for Majors, Also Indie Producers," *Variety*, 4 January 1946, 36.

39. "Producers Follow Trends toward More Adult Fare," *Hollywood Reporter*, 26 December 1945, 3; "Public Demanding New Type of Films, Studio Execs Agree," *Hollywood Reporter*, 28 May 1947, 1, 11,

40. Jean-Claude Carrière, *The Secret Language of Film*, trans. Jeremy Leggatt (New York: Pantheon, 1994), 15.

41. The online edition is available at http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/default.aspx?s=. The print edition sometimes contains more information on the films, but the online version has been updated since original publication.

42. Andrew Sarris, "The High Forties Revisited" (1962), in *The Primal Screen: Essays on Film and Related Subjects* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 29. Sarris is responding to John Russell Taylor, "The High 40's," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 30, no. 4 (Autumn 1961): 188–91.

CHAPTER 1

1. Henry James, *Hawthorne* (London: Macmillan, 1879), 31.

2. Thomas M. Pryor, "Surveying the Week's Film News," *New York Times*, 9 August 1942, X3; "N.Y. B.O. in OK Tempo," *Variety*, 5 August 1942, 19.

3. Comprehensive reviews of this period are to be found in Mae Huettig, *Economic Control of the Motion Picture Industry: A Study in Industrial Organization* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1944); Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: British Film Institute, 2008); Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon, 1988); and Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s* (New York: Scribner's, 1997). Much of what

follows in this chapter is indebted to these excellent studies. In addition, the government's 1938 antitrust Bill of Complaint concisely outlines the history, structure, and conduct of the industry. See "The Complete Text of U.S. Bill of Complaint," in *1940–41 International Motion Picture Almanac*, ed. Terry Ramsaye (New York: Quigley, 1940), 988–1010.

4. I follow Huettig, who claims that the industry uses "the Majors" to refer to all eight principal studios. See *Economic Control,* 64–87. Other scholars confine the term "Majors" to just the Big Five.

5. Six months later *Random Harvest* (1943) played Radio City even longer and had over 1.5 million viewers, a number never surpassed. See "*Random Harvest* Booked for Eleventh Week, Setting All-Time Record for Music Hall," *New York Times*, 23 February 1943, 25; "11 Pix Grossed $5,512,000 for Music Hall Past Year, New High," *Variety*, 22 September 1943, 4.

6. Lee Oremont, quoted in Studs Terkel, *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War II* (New York: New Press, 1984), 315.

7. "Nation's Boxoffice Booming," *Hollywood Reporter*, 15 November 1941, 3.

8. Quoted in George Stevens Jr., *Conversations with the Great Moviemakers of Hollywood's Golden Age at the American Film Institute* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 82.

9. "Everything Follows," *Variety*, 9 January 1946, 38.

10. Michele Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 67–70.

11. Herb Golden, "Bing, Bergman, 'Bells' '46 Boffs," *Variety*, 8 January 1947, 3.

12. Eric Hoyt, *Hollywood Vault: Film Libraries before Home Video* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 108–33. See also "Re-issues Flood N.Y. Screens," *Hollywood Reporter*, 22 May 1947, 1, 3; "Industry Schedules 130 Re-releases for This Year," *Hollywood Reporter*, 9 February 1948, 1, 13.

13. Mori Kruschen, "Talent, Manpower Remain Biz's Major Concern," *Variety*, 3 January 1945, 5, 114.

14. Arthur Ungar, "Record Film Rentals in '43," *Variety*, 5 January 1944, 1; James Agee, *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, ed. Michael Sragow (New York: Library of America, 2005), 478.

15. Doug McClelland, *Forties Film Talk: Oral Histories of Hollywood, with 120 Lobby Posters* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), 111, 346. This book includes similar recollections from many other performers.

16. Darryl F. Zanuck, *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck: The Golden Years at Twentieth Century–Fox* (New York: Grove, 1993), 64.

17. Frank Gruber, "The Mystery Writer Can Make Money," *Publishers Weekly*, 4 April 1941, 1450; "Pulp Mags Resent Attempt to Lure Penny-a-Liners to Film Studios," *Variety*, 10 November 1943, 2.

18. Frank Gruber, *The Pulp Jungle* (Los Angeles: Sherbourne, 1967), 169; Richard Mealand, "Books into Films," *Publishers Weekly*, 11 May 1946, 2555.

19. Steve Wilson, *The Making of "Gone with the Wind"* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 5.

20. James Curtis, *Spencer Tracy: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 2011), 507.

21. Paul Nathan, "Books into Films," *Publishers Weekly*, 15 March 1947, 1631.

22. "Hollywood Angels Broadway," *Hollywood Reporter*, 5 October 1942, 1, 7; "Record 'Product Pool' for WB," *Hollywood Reporter*, 16 August 1944, 1, 10; "H'wood Puts 2 Million in Plays," *Hollywood Reporter*, 3 June 1946, 1, 4; Burns Mantle, "The Season in New York," in *Best Plays of 1944–45 and the Year Book of the Drama in America*, ed. Burns Mantle (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1945), 3.

23. Richard Mealand, "Books into Films," *Publishers Weekly*, 20 October 1945, 1845; Mealand, "Books into Films," *Publishers Weekly*, 27 October 1945, 1966.

24. "Movie Companies Look to Detective Story Writers for the New Psychological Film," *Publishers Weekly*, 9 March 1946, 1516; "Metro: Peace Expansion Faced with Heavy List of Stars," *Daily Variety*, 29 October 1945, 43. The buying frenzy is recalled in Donald Friede, "I Was a Hollywood Story Agent," *Writer's Digest*, May 1949, 22-37.

25. William Dozier, "Trends and Perspectives," in *Writers' Congress: The Proceedings of the Conference Held in October 1943 under the Sponsorship of the Hollywood Writers Mobilization and the University of California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1944), 36–37.

26. Murray Schumach, "Nation's Entertainment Industry in Decline toward Pre-war Level," *New York Times*, 21 July 1948, 1, 26.

27. "$20,000,000 Worth of Yarns Dumped on Studio Market," *Hollywood Reporter*, 5 October 1948, 9.

28. "Renaissance of Showmanship," *Daily Variety*, 20 October 1947, 342.

29. Andy W. Smith Jr., "Greater Demand for A's; Drive-Ins' Plus Values," *Variety*, 4 January 1950, 21; "300 Foreign Pix in US Release," *Hollywood Reporter*, 14 March 952, 1, 4.

30. "Writers' Cramps," *Daily Variety*, 25 October 1948, 392; "H'd Employment 50 Pct. off from Peak, Sawyer Told," *Hollywood Reporter*, 22 September 1949, 4.

31. Sources for the statistics in the preceding paragraphs are Joel W. Finler, *The Hollywood Story* (New York: Crown, 1988), 286–89; "Characteristics of Motion Picture Audiences," in Christopher H. Sterling and Timothy R. Haight, *The Mass Media: Aspen Institute Guide to Communication Industry Trends* (New York: Praeger, 1978), 352; Winfield Andrus, "Industry Statistics," in *Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures 1943*, ed. Jack Alicoate (New York: Film Daily, 1943), 43; Chester B. Bahn and Winfield Andrus, "Industry Statistics," in *The Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures 1952* (New York: Film Daily, 1952), 121.

32. Dore Schary, *Heyday: An Autobiography* (New York: Berkley, 1981), 253.

33. For a detailed account of the production process, see Ronald L. Davis, *The Glamour Factory: Inside Hollywood's Big Studio System* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993).

34. Dozier, "Trends and Perspectives," 39.

35. See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), chaps. 1, 3, 4, 6.

36. Leonard J. Leff and Jerold L. Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code from the 1920s to the 1960s* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 79–184; Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen and the Production Code Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 132–71, 225–91.

37. James Naremore has suggested that film noir owes something to the Popular Front melodramas of the 1930s. See *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 15–16.

38. Philip K. Scheuer, "Guitry *Cheat* Reveals Many-Faceted Talent," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 December 1938, 15; John Scott, "*Pearls of the Crown* Novel Film," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 June 1938, 6; "Hornblow Lauds *Story of a Cheat*," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 August 1940, A10. See also "Hollywood Inside," *Daily Variety*, 2 March 1942, 2, for Guitry's purported influence on Albert Lewin's *Moon and Sixpence*.

39. "New Goldwyn Pact Permits Wyler Outside Pix," *Daily Variety*, 29 August 1941, 5.

40. Bill Brogdon, "Dominant '42 Film Trend, apart from War Stories, Was Growth of Writer-Producer's Worth," *Variety*, 6 January 1943, 12; Arthur Ungar, "1939 Hollywood Toppers," *Variety*, 3 January 1940, 28. Directors' new power was partly a result of their negotiating a 1939 agreement with the studios, which guaranteed longer preparation times and supervision of a rough cut. The same agreement defined contracts for producer-directors. See "Directors Win Big Victory," *Variety,* 30 October 1939, 285, and Leo C. Rosten, *Hollywood: The Movie Colony, the Movie Makers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1941), 283–303.

41. Lutz Bacher, *Max Ophuls in the Hollywood Studios* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 39.

42. Kruschen, "Talent, Manpower," 5.

43. "Need Fresh Pix Directors," *Variety*, 26 July 1939, 7, 10.

44. For a startlingly long list of German talent in Hollywood from 1933 to 1960, see Jan-Christopher Horak, *Fluchtpunkt Hollywood* (Munich: MAkS, 1986).

45. On Hollywood as a community, see Rosten, *Hollywood*, and Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood, the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie Makers* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950).

46. Chester B. Bahn, "Industry Statistics," in *The 1941 Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures*, ed. Jack Alicoate (New York: Film Daily, 1941), 35. By the end of the decade, the totals were even smaller. In 1950, only 315 actors were under major studio contracts, and directors, writers, and producers numbered only about 125 per category. See Chester B. Bahn and Winfield Andrus, "Industry Statistics," in *The 1951 Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures*, ed. Jack Alicoate (New York: Film Daily, 1951), 83–85.

47. Bernard F. Dick, *City of Dreams: The Making and Remaking of Universal Pictures* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 135–37.

48. Details, some of which may even be accurate, can be found in Evelyn Keyes, *Scarlett O'Hara's Younger Sister: My Lively Life In and Out of Hollywood* (Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart, 1977), 54–160.

49. William Dieterle, in *Close Up: The Contract Director*, ed. Jon Tuska (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1976), 116.

50. Lou McMahon, *Yakima Canutt: A Directors Guild of America Oral History* (Los Angeles: Directors Guild of America, 1977), T4B/P19.

51. Letter from David O. Selznick to Alfred Hitchcock, 12 December 1938, David O. Selznick Collection, Harry Ransom Research Center, University of Texas—Austin.

52. Ed Sikov, *On Sunset Boulevard: The Life and Times of Billy Wilder* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), 283.

53. Quoted in Tom Kemper, *Hidden Talent: The Emergence of Hollywood Agents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 154.

54. John P. Fulton, "How We Made *The Invisible Man*," in *The ASC Treasury of Visual Effects*, ed. Linwood Dunn and George E, Turner (Los Angeles: ASC, 1983), 117–20.

55. On the ASC, the Academy, and technological cooperation, see Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, pts. 4 and 6; on the 1938 campaign, see Catherine Jurca, *Hollywood 1938: Motion Pictures' Greatest Year* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

56. Kemper, *Hidden Talent*, 152–53.

57. Quoted in Ronald L. Davis, *Just Making Movies: Company Directors on the Studio System* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 66.

58. Quoted in John Kobal, *People Will Talk* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 557.

59. Vincent Sherman, *Studio Affairs: My Life as a Film Director* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 75.

60. Jim Hillier, "Interview with Stanley Donen," in *Celluloid Symphonies: Texts and Contexts in the Film Music History*, ed. Julie Hubbert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 281.

61. Quoted in Henry Jaglom, *My Lunches with Orson: Conversations between Henry Jaglom and Orson Welles* (New York: Metropolitan, 2013), 53.

62. Ed Sikov, *Dark Victory: The Life of Bette Davis* (New York: Holt), 179.

63. Quoted in Tuska, *Close Up*, 116.

64. Schary, *Heyday*, 228.

65. Davis, *Just Making Movies*, 181–82.

66. Curtis Harrington, *Nice Guys Don't Work in Hollywood: The Adventures of an Aesthete in the Movie Business* (Chicago: Drag City, 2013), 25–26.

67. "Home Projection Circuit Hits New High of 137 Rooms," *Hollywood Reporter*, 12 May 1941, 4.

68. Charles Brackett, in *"It's the Pictures That Got Small": Charles Brackett*

on Billy Wilder and Hollywood's Golden Age, ed. Anthony Slide (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 309.

69. McClelland, *Forties Film Talk*, 403.

70. Memo from David O. Selznick to Raymond Klune, 2 October 1939, and on reshooting shots for *Rebecca*; Selznick letter to Daniel O'Shea, 19 May 1939, Harry Ransom Center.

71. Quoted in Robert van Gelder, "An Interview with Budd Schulberg," *New York Times Book Review*, 10 August 1941, 2.

72. Quoted in Patrick McGilligan, *Backstory 2: Interviews with Screenwriters of the 1940s and 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 224. Casey Robinson disagreed, saying that MGM, with its multiple assignments for one project, was "the graveyard of writers" (McGilligan, *Backstory* 2, 309).

73. The reference is to Henry Fonda in *The Lady Eve* (1941). See my blog entry "Pike's Peek" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2011/06/19/pikes-peek/.

74. It occurs in Welles's radio version of *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (broadcast 11 February 1940).

75. Hurd Hatfield in McClelland, *Forties Film Talk*, 316.

76. Quoted in Aaron Latham, *Crazy Sundays: F. Scott Fitzgerald in Hollywood* (New York: Viking, 1971), 243.

77. One review noted that the toothpaste scene was one of the "moments . . . that make the picture great" ("*Wing and a Prayer* Glorious Saga of American Manhood," *Hollywood Reporter*, 19 July 1944, 4).

78. Quoted in *Henry Hathaway: A Directors Guild of America Oral History*, ed. Rudy Behlmer (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 198.

79. Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.

80. Zanuck, *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck*, 69.

81. Charles Bennett, *Hitchcock's Partner in Suspense: The Life of Screenwriter Charles Bennett* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 177.

82. Philip Dunne, *Take Two: A Life in Movies and Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), 292–93.

83. Sherman, *Studio Affairs*, 68.

84. Davis, *Just Making Movies*, 87.

85. Paul S. Nathan, "Books into Films," *Publishers Weekly*, 28 May 1949, 2174.

86. "Switch on Westerns Creates Burlesque," *Hollywood Reporter*, 8 April 1952, 3. See also "*Manhandled*; Strong Melo: Surprise Switches Keep It Exciting," *Hollywood Reporter*, 12 April 1949, 3; "*Dancing* Heartwarming," *Hollywood Reporter*, 4 November 1949, 3.

87. Dwight Bolinger, "Among the New Words," *American Speech* 17, no. 4 (December 1942): 269.

88. Harold Wentworth, "The Neo-Pseudo-Suffix '-eroo,'" *American Speech*

17, no. 1 (February 1942): 15, cites M. H. Weseen's *Dictionary of American Slang* (New York: Crowell, 1934).

89. H. T. Webster, "They Don't Speak Our Language," *Forum and Century* 90, no. 6 (December 1933): 372.

90. Budd Schulberg, *What Makes Sammy Run?* (1941; New York: Vintage, 1990), 74. See also Sidney Skolsky, "The Movie Formula," *Variety*, 9 January 1946, 37; Emerson Crocker and Brainerd Duffield, "The Switcheroo," *Hollywood Reporter*, 29 October 1951, n.p.

91. See E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 146–78. I emphasize the role of schemas in artistic problem solving in Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 152–57.

92. See Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*, chap. 6.

93. Memo from Selznick to Hal Kern, 31 January 1944, Harry Ransom Research Center.

94. *Now, Voyager*, ed. Jeanne Thomas Allen (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 86.

95. Hal Wallis and Charles Higham, *Starmaker: The Autobiography of Hal Wallis* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 107.

96. Selznick memo to Hal Kern, 28 January 1944, Harry Ransom Research Center.

97. Selznick memo to Hal Pereira et al., 11 January 1944, Harry Ransom Research Center.

98. See my blog entry "Molly Wanted More" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2011/04/27/molly-wanted-more/.

99. Clayton Hamilton, "Building a Play Backward," *Bookman*, February 1914, 605.

100. Joseph Warren Beach, *The Twentieth-Century Novel: Studies in Technique* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1932), 121.

101. This is one respect in which the idea of "moderate" or "middlebrow" modernism differs from that of "vernacular modernism" proposed by Miriam Hansen. For Hansen, Hollywood studio cinema as a whole is a mass-production parallel to the elite modernism associated with high art. The affinity, she contends, arises from the fact that popular cinema and High Modernism share the condition of "modernity." My conception of middlebrow modernism is based not on external circumstances but on choices about the ways narrative techniques are deployed in literature, drama, cinema, and other storytelling media. Such techniques are not part of Hansen's argument. In addition, I emphasize the circulation of those formal options among several media—magazines, radio, and the like. Hansen's case is made in "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," *Modernism/Modernity* 6, no. 2 (1999): 59–77.

102. Other examples are Brander Matthews's *The Philosophy of the Short-Story* (1901) and *The Short Story* (1907), Clayton Hamilton's *Materials and Meth-*

ods of Fiction (1908), and especially Joseph Warren Beach's *The Method of Henry James* (1918).

103. Thomas H. Uzzell and Camelia Waite Uzzell, *Narrative Technique: A Practical Course in Literary Psychology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929), 410–38. One guidebook devotes eighty pages to choosing a narrator, as opposed to choosing a character viewpoint; ten years before, the distinction had been of merely academic concern. See John Gallishaw, *Twenty Problems of the Fiction Writer* (New York: Putnam's, 1929), 158.

104. Harry Levin, "What Was Modernism?" *Massachusetts Review* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1960): 610.

105. W. S. Burnett, who gave us the hard-bitten *Little Caesar* (1929), published *Goodbye to the Past* (1934), which tells its story in reverse order. In *Cast Down the Laurel* (1934), Arnold Gingrich channels Gide's *Counterfeiters* and brings together notes for a (fictitious) novel, the novel itself, and a critique of the novel. For a warning that the trend could turn gimmicky, see John T. Frederick, "New Techniques in the Novel," *English Journal* 24, no. 5 (May 1935): 353–63.

106. Dos Passos's kaleidoscopic structure was developed in Kenneth Fearing's *The Hospital* (1939), in which twenty-five first-person narrators (including inanimate objects) recount several patients' stories in overlapping time blocks.

107. A sweeping contemporaneous review of these traditions is Mordecai Gorelik's *New Theatres for Old* (New York: Samuel French, 1940), especially chaps. 6–9.

108. Macdonald explains the concept in most detail in the essay "Masscult & Midcult," *Against the American Grain: Essays on the Effects of Mass Culture* (New York: Random House, 1962), 3-75.

109. James Naremore writes of modernist themes (the Dark City, violence, the unconscious) surfacing in the "popular modernism" of 1920s and 1930s crime fiction. See *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts*, updated and expanded ed. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2008), 40–48.

110. Virginia MacFadyen, *Bittern Point: A Modern Mystery Story* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1926).

111. Leonard Maltin, *The Great American Broadcast* (New York: Dutton, 1997), 29–50.

112. On radio's popularity see Erik Barnouw, *A Handbook of Radio Writing: An Outline of Techniques and Markets in Radio Writing in the United States* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1939), 3, 68; Neil Verma, *Theater of the Mind: Imagination, Aesthetics, and American Radio Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 95.

113. I discuss these in blogs at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2015/03/08/1932-mgm-invents-the-future-part-1/ and http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2014/11/23/what-if-movies-forking-paths-in-the-drawing-room/.

114. Cornell Woolrich, *The Black Path of Fear* (New York: Ace, 1944), 179.

115. James T. Farrell, "The End of a Literary Decade," *American Mercury*,

December 1939, 414; Albert D. Van Nostrand, *The Denatured Novel* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), 109, 122–32.

116. Thomas Walsh's *Nightmare in Manhattan* (1950) became *Union Station* (1950).

117. "Stephen Sondheim Recalls *Allegro*," booklet essay in *Allegro* CD recording (Masterworks Broadway 88697-41738-1, 2009), 16.

118. Malcolm Bradbury, "The Art of Novel Writing, 1945–1970," in *Diverging Parallels: A Comparison of American and European Thought and Action*, ed. Arie Nicolaas Jan den Hollander (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 113–17.

119. Harry Levin, "What Was Modernism?" 613–16. See also Chester E. Eisinger, *Fiction of the Forties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 13–21; Lionel Trilling, "Art and Fortune," *Partisan Review* 15, no. 12 (December 1948): 1271–92.

120. Eric Bentley, "The Drama at Ebb," *Kenyon Review* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1945): 181.

121. Robert M. Coates, "The State of the Novel," *Yale Review* 36 (June 1947): 609–10. Coates was soon to find success with a suspense thriller, *Wisteria Cottage* (1948).

122. Claudia Roth Pierpont, "Margaret Mitchell," in *Passionate Minds: Women Rewriting the World* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 101.

INTERLUDE: SPRING 1940

1. For adverse comment on the flashbacks, see "Married and in Love," *Variety*, 7 February 1940, 16.

2. So too would *Hi-Yo Silver!* (April 1940), Republic's feature version of its Lone Ranger serial. The serial is compressed through editing, and its action is embedded as flashbacks from a chatty geezer recounting the legend to a boy at a dude ranch.

3. For enthusiastic anticipation of a film that contains "flash forwards as well as flash backs" (not true, I think), see Philip K. Scheuer, "Town Called Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 June 1940, C3. Typical of the critical response is Bosley Crowther: "The only way to suggest the confusion and pretentiousness of this film is to state what it's all about." See "*Stranger on the Third Floor*, Murder Mystery, at Rialto," *New York Times*, 2 September 1940, 19.

4. I discuss these films in "Grandmaster Flashback" in David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Minding Movies: Observations on the Art, Craft, and Business of Filmmaking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 135-54 and "1932: MGM Invents the Future (Part 1)" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2015/03/08/1932-mgm-invents-the-future-part-1/.

5. Dwight Macdonald, "Masscult & Midcult," in *Against the American Grain: Essays on the Effects of Mass Culture* (New York: Random House, 1962), 43–44.

6. For an overview of the adaptation process, see David Eldridge, "Filming *Our Town* (1940), or The Problem of 'Looking at Everything Hard Enough,'" in

Modern American Drama on the Screen, ed. William Robert Bray and R. Barton Palmer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 29–50.

7. Mary McCarthy, "Class Angles and a Wilder Classic," in *Mary McCarthy's Theatre Chronicles, 1937–1962* (Lincoln, NE: Authors Guild/iUniverse, 2000), 24.

8. See my essay "William Cameron Menzies: One Forceful, Impressive Idea [2010]" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/menzies.php.

9. A brief discussion is in David Bordwell, "Deep-Focus Cinematography," in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, ed. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 344–45.

10. See Douglas W. Churchill, "Screen News Here and in Hollywood," *New York Times*, 25 September 1939, 22.

11. Sol Lesser, "Paging Thornton Wilder," *New York Times*, 9 June 1940, X4.

12. Letter from Thornton Wilder to Sol Lesser (24 March 1940) in "*Our Town*: From Stage to Screen," in *Thornton Wilder: Collected Plays and Writings on Theater*, ed. J. D. McClatchy (New York: Library of America, 2007), 681.

13. Ibid.

14. McCarthy, "Class Angles," 25.

15. Philip K. Scheuer, "Town Called Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 October 1939, C3; "Size-Ups," *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, 4 November 1939, 11.

CHAPTER 2

1. Quoted in Ronald L. Davis, *Just Making Movies: Company Directors on the Studio System* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 96.

2. For example, the 1912 Edison two-reeler *The Passer by* [*sic*], establishes a situation in which men at a dinner party recount their past lives. The camera tracks in on an old derelict speaking, and the film dissolves to him as a younger man, also speaking. Then a symmetrical reverse tracking shot reveals he's at a dinner party years before.

3. "A Woman's Face," *Daily Variety*, 5 May 1941, 3.

4. "Hedda Hopper's Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 June 1941, A11.

5. George E. Phair, "Retakes," *Variety*, 4 June 1941, 2.

6. Hanna, "*Lydia* Good Woman's Drama," *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, 20 September 1941, 22.

7. Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 106–10.

8. Wells Root, *Writing the Script: A Practical Guide for Films and Television* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 82. Francis Marion's screenplay manual advises novices to avoid flashbacks. See *How to Write and Sell Film Stories* (New York: Covici, Friede, 1937), 223–24.

9. The script of *Infidelity* (written in 1937–38) is available in "*Infidelity*:

A Screenplay by F. Scott Fitzgerald," *Esquire* 80, no. 6 (December 1973): 193–200, 290–304. In explaining the screenplay's "somewhat unusual structure," Fitzgerald noted that by showing a married couple's "mysterious indifference" to one another, the lengthy flashback would allow the audience to focus on "the why and how." See *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Life in Letters*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (New York: Scribner's, 1994), 348.

10. As reported by Catherine Tunney, quoted in *Mildred Pierce*, ed. Albert J. LaValley (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 29.

11. Ronald Haver, *David O. Selznick's Hollywood* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 338–42. The flashbacks all featured the departed father of the family, but because preview audiences complained about length, all these episodes were cut.

12. *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck: The Golden Years at Twentieth Century-Fox*, ed. Rudy Behlmer (New York: Grove), 80. Preminger proposed starting the film with the arrest of Ruth, the woman Ellen has set up as a murderer. In the final film, a frame story close to that of the original novel was used.

13. "Hollywood Inside," *Variety*, 16 September 1946, 2. The producer was Seymour Nebenzal, and the film was *The Chase* (1946). Although the flashback was dropped in editing, the plot acquired a peculiar time warp anyway. I discuss the result below on pp. 331–35.

14. Quoted in Haver, *Selznick's Hollywood*, 314.

15. Bernard F. Dick, *The Merchant Prince of Poverty Row: Harry Cohn of Columbia Pictures* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 170–72.

16. Anthony Bower, "Iconoclast in Hollywood," *Nation*, 26 April 1941, 508; Otis Ferguson, "Welles and His Wonders," *New Republic*, 16 June 1941, 7.

17. Philip K. Scheuer, "*Double Indemnity*, Study of Murder without Bunk," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 August 1949, 10.

18. Lewis Herman, *A Practical Manual of Screen Playwriting for Theater and Television Films* (Cleveland: World, 1952), 67–70.

19. See Clayton Hamilton, "Building a Play Backward," in *Problems of the Playwright* (New York: Holt, 1917), 9–24. Although some reviewers noted that *On Trial* seemed to be influenced by films' flashback technique, Rice claimed he hadn't done that intentionally. He had been inspired by an earlier version of Hamilton's chapter in which the critic suggested reversing the sequence of acts. The courtroom frame was a way to motivate inverted chronology through testimony. See Elmer Rice, *Minority Report: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 103–4.

20. See Katharine Seymour and J. T. W. Martin, *Practical Radio Writing: The Technique of Writing for Broadcasting Simply and Thoroughly Explained* (New York: Longmans Green, 1938), 38–39; Luther Philip Weaver, *The Technique of Radio Writing* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1948), 118–19.

21. The 1947 stage adaptation of Warren's novel seems influenced by cinematic voice-over: while past events play out on the main stage, characters discuss the event in a forestage area. See Wolcott Gibbs, "The Theatre: Midseason Miscellany," *New Yorker*, 24 January 1948, 43, and William M. Schutte, "The

Dramatic Versions of the Willie Stark Story," in *All the King's Men: A Symposium*, ed. John A. Hart (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Institute of Technology, 1957), 82–83.

22. See John Van Druten, "Foreword to the Acting Edition," in *I Remember Mama* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1945), 4–6. RKO had purchased the rights to the original novel, *Mama's Bank Account* (1943), but production was suspended to allow the play to go forward ("Hollywood Inside," *Daily Variety*, 19 April 1948, 2). The film is closely modeled on the play. Perhaps Van Druten, knowing a film would follow, made the stage version more cinematic.

23. Neil Verma, *Theater of the Mind: Imagination, Aesthetics, and American Radio Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 102.

24. See Stanley Vestal, "Significant Form," *Writer* 54, no. 1 (January 1941): 11–12; Catharine Barrett, "The Beautiful Flashback," *Writer* 59, no. 6 (June 1946): 184–88.

25. Sarah Litsey, "Fiction's Memory—the Flashback," *Writer* 64, no. 3 (March 1951): 67–69. A similar view from about the same time is Hamlen Hunt, "Begin in the Middle," *Writer* 67, no. 7 (July 1954): 233–34.

26. See Turim, *Flashbacks in Film*, 3–5.

27. On *The Last Moment*, see Kristin Thompson, "The Limits of Experimentation in Hollywood," in *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-Garde*, ed. Jan-Christopher Horak (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 87–89. The film is lost.

28. "*The Phantom of Crestwood*," *Variety*, 18 October 1932, 15. The transitions into the flashbacks are given by whip pans, preceded by rapid zooms that are still striking today.

29. Sturges's original script played with a more nonchronological ordering for the sake of a final bitter shock. Garner discovers that his own son, Tommy, has fathered Eve's child; Tom kills himself. This sequence was to be followed by a scene of the young Tom praying after Tommy's birth. See "*The Power and the Glory*," in *Three More Screenplays by Preston Sturges*, ed. Andrew Horton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 135–40.

30. In other media, trials have long served as motivation for flashbacks from multiple viewpoints. A major example, perhaps the first, is Robert Browning's verse novel *The Ring and the Book* (1868–69).

31. Pauline Kael, "Raising *Kane*," in *The Citizen Kane Book* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 35. In the 1930s, Mankiewicz had built a play script around the memories of people who had known John Dillinger. See Richard Meryman, *Mank: The Wit, World, and Life of Herman Mankiewicz* (New York: Morrow, 1978), 246.

32. The programs "Dracula" (1938), "The Hurricane" (1939), and "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" (1940) provide vivid examples of multiple narrators and embedded flashbacks. For a comprehensive account of Welles's radio work, see Paul Heyer, *The Medium and the Magician: Orson Welles, the Radio Years, 1935–1952* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

33. Edward D. Hoch dates the dying message convention from Doyle's

Sherlock Holmes story "The Boscombe Valley Mystery" (1891). See the entry "Dying Message" in *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*, ed. Rosemary Herbert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 127–28.

34. *Marching Song*, a play Welles wrote in his teens, was structured in a similar way. See Barbara Leaming, *Orson Welles: A Biography* (New York: Viking, 1985), 54–55.

35. David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2016), 104–5, analyzes how the newsreel anticipates the film's overall structure in surprising detail.

36. On Living Newspaper techniques, see appendix 1 to Stuart Cosgrove, "The Living Newspaper: History, Production and Form" (PhD diss., University of Hull, 1982), 237–44. In the same vein, Welles's juvenile play *Marching Song* included slide projections of photographs and newspaper headlines. On the 1936 Kingsley play, which incorporated mock newsreel footage, see Simon Callow, *Orson Welles: The Road to Xanadu* (New York: Viking, 1995), 223–25, and Patrick McGilligan, *Young Orson: The Years of Luck and Genius on the Path to "Citizen Kane"* (New York: Harper, 2015), 367. See also my blog entry, "Welles at 101, *Kane* at 75 or Thereabouts," http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2016/05/06/welles-at-101-kane-at-75-or-thereabouts/.

37. On *Smiler with a Knife*, see Callow, *Orson Welles*, 487.

38. For an analysis of a contemporary film relying on replays, see "Replay It Again, Clint: Sully and the Simulations," at http://www.davidbordwell.net/2016/09/25/replay-it-again-clint-sully-and-the-simulations.

39. Philip K. Scheuer, "A Town Called Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 May 1941, C4.

40. Traces of the replay remain in the finished film. See "Innovation by Accident" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2013/09/10/innovation-by-accident/.

41. Meryman, *Mank*, 247. This strategy was approximated decades later in Hong Sang-soo's *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* (2000).

42. See Robert Carringer, *The Making of "Citizen Kane"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 25. At one point in Leland's flashback, when we see Kane meet Susan Alexander for the first time, Leland isn't present, but his voice-over commentary indicates that he heard about the meeting from Charlie.

43. This sequence, not in the play, aroused the dramatist's ire. See R. Barton Palmer and William Robert Brady, *Hollywood's Tennessee: The Williams Films and Postwar America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 54.

44. Mordaunt Hall's review of *The Bellamy Trial* (1929) remarked on "the testimony and the fading-out into stories of the various witnesses" ("The Screen," *New York Times*, 21 January 1929, 34). Another reviewer felt obliged to explain that the courtroom audience is accessing only the words of the witnesses, not the pictures we see ("The Bellamy Trial," *Motion Picture News*, 2 February 1929, 368).

45. "*I, Jane Doe* Dramatic Despite Trite Pattern," *Hollywood Reporter*, 12 May 1948, 4.

46. Brog., "The Paradine Case," *Variety*, 31 December 1947, 10.

47. "Guest in the House," screenplay by Ketti Frings no. 31 (n.d.), 164–65. Ketti Frings Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society Collection.

48. The most widely circulated versions of the film have eliminated the framing opening; I suspect this is due to cutting for television release during the 1950s.

49. Quoted in Peter Brunette and Gerald Peary, "James M. Cain: Tough Guy," in *Backstory: Interviews with Screenwriters of Hollywood's Golden Age* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 127.

50. On hindsight bias, see B. Fischoff, "Hindsight ≠ Foresight: The Effect of Outcome Knowledge on Judgment under Uncertainty," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 1 (1975): 288–99. A review of the literature is in Neal J. Roese and Kathleen D. Vohs, "Hindsight Bias," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7, no. 5 (2012): 411–26.

51. This device derives from the film's source play, *One Sunday Afternoon* (1933), in which a dentist recalls the love of his youth. James Hagen's play was redone as a musical, complete with flashback, in *One Sunday Afternoon* (1948).

52. An extract from this scene is available at http://www.davidbordwell.net/books/reinventing.php.

53. "*Sorry, Wrong Number*," *Harrison's Reports*, 31 July 1948, 122.

54. Although 20th Century–Fox tried to keep patrons from entering during the middle of its flashback-heavy *All about Eve*, both exhibitors and audiences rejected the "scheduled program" policy. See "20th Forbidding Exhibs to Double-Bill *All about Eve*," *Daily Variety*, 11 September 1950, 1–2; "Scheduled Performances Halted after One Week," *Boxoffice*, 21 October 1950, 11; and "Business on *Eve* at Roxy Jumps after Scheduled Showings Cut," *Boxoffice*, 28 October 1950, 50. On continuous screenings of the period, see the blog entry "Despoiling the Movies" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2011/08/15/despoiling-the-movies/.

55. Hal Wallis and Charles Higham, *Starmaker: The Autobiography of Hal Wallis* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 104.

56. See "James M. Cain: Tough Guy," in *Backstory: Interviews with Screenwriters of Hollywood's Golden Age*, ed. Patrick McGilligan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 115.

57. Meir Sternberg, *Expositional Structure and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), chap. 5.

58. The film's strategies are surveyed by Kristin Thompson in "Duplicitous Narration and *Stage Fright*," in *Breaking the Glass Armour: Neoformalist Film Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 135–61.

59. "Through Thin and Thick," in *Farber on Film: The Complete Film Writings of Manny Farber*, ed. Robert Polito (New York: Library of America, 2009), 229.

60. I analyze the flashback structure of *The Killers* in David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 193–98.

61. This outline of *Passage to Marseille* simplifies the plot architecture a little. The first Devil's Island block is actually two chunks, a brief one introducing a few of the team members, followed by a return to the narrating situation on the ship, then followed by a much lengthier set of scenes on Devil's Island. The pattern of the embedded flashbacks remains intact, though.

62. *Men without Country*, the short novel that served as the film's source, has only one long central flashback: Freycinet's first-person recounting. That is filled with dialogue and summary passages that would have made for slow cinema by Hollywood standards. See Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall, *Men without Country* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1942), 55, 122.

63. Sten., "*Passage to Marseille*," *Variety*, 16 February 1944, 10.

64. "*Beyond Glory* Reverses Trite War-Hero Theme," *Hollywood Reporter*, 15 June 1948, 3.

65. Abrams, "*Beyond Glory* Poor Alan Ladd Vehicle," *Independent Exhibitors Film Bulletin*, 21 June 1948, 11. Another trade reviewer commented that the story "is one that demands close audience attention because of the flashback method of telling" ("*Beyond Glory*," *Variety*, 16 June 1948, 8).

66. John McCracken, "Nine-Day Enoch," *New Yorker*, 27 September 1947, 105; "Garson Boxoffice Draw Main Factor," *Hollywood Reporter*, 26 September 1947, 3; Bosley Crowther, "*Sorry, Wrong Number*, Based on Radio Play, at Paramount," *New York Times*, 2 September 1948, 18; "*Passage* Going B.O. Places," *Hollywood Reporter*, 16 February 1944, 3; "*Passage to Marseille* Liked by B'way Critics," *Hollywood Reporter*, 23 February 1994, 17; "*Passage to Marseille*," in *New York Motion Picture Critics' Reviews*, vol. 1 (New York: Critics' Theatre Reviews, 1944), 467–69; "N.Y. Critics Heap Praise on *Sorry, Wrong Number*," *Hollywood Reporter*, 9 September 1948, 7.

INTERLUDE: KITTY AND LYDIA, JULIA AND NANCY

1. For background on preparation of the screenplay, see Bernard F. Dick, *Radical Innocence: A Critical Study of the Hollywood Ten* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 186–93.

2. The snow globe has obvious affinities with *Citizen Kane*, which was being shot at RKO just before *Kitty Foyle* was released. Lest we think *Kitty*'s scenarists stole the idea from Welles and Mankiewicz, it's worth noting that Morley's novel includes the same prop. Its significance is explained in the final pages. "Little girl on a sleigh ride," Kitty says. "She's had some bad spills, but still coasting" (Christopher Morley, *Kitty Foyle* [Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1939], 331). It's possible that Welles and Mankiewicz got the idea from the book.

3. "*Lydia* Too Naughty Hays Office Rules," *Hollywood Reporter*, 15 July 1941, 1.

4. "Korda Okays Haysian Sapolio for *Lydia*," *Variety*, 30 July 1941, 5.

5. In Hollywood's version of pedantry, Richard's recitation varies from the original, substituting "Lalla Rookh" for Zelica, the name of a character in an embedded tale in Moore's original. There her lover Azim will kill her by mistake. See Thomas Moore, *Lalla Rookh: An Oriental Romance* (London: Routledge, 1868), 63–64.

6. In his autobiography, composer Miklós Rózsa attributed this experiment to Duvivier, who wanted music to be "something other than mere wallpaper." See Rózsa, *A Double Life* (New York: Wynwood, 1989), 125. The snatches of music consist of bits from the big waltz scene and one using the film's other principal motif, which swells when Lydia's grandmother mentions death. Thanks to Jeff Smith for noting this.

7. An extract from the scene is available at http://www.davidbordwell.net/books/reinventing.php.

8. The screenplay was originally called *Chameleon*, suggesting a creature that adjusts to its surroundings. See Martin Field, "Twice-Sold Tales," *Screen Writer* 2, no. 12 (May 1947): 2.

CHAPTER 3

1. See Kristin Thompson, "The Continuity System," in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production*, by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 194–213.

2. Otis Ferguson, "Not So Deep as a Well" (1935)," in *The Film Criticism of Otis Ferguson*, ed. Robert Wilson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1971), 72.

3. Ferguson, "Fritz Lang and Company," in *Film Criticism*, 372.

4. Andrew Turnbull, ed., *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Dell, 1963), 580. Fitzgerald biographer Aaron Latham suggests that learning Hollywood construction sensitized the writer to the virtues of pace and vividness (*Crazy Sundays: F. Scott Fitzgerald in Hollywood* [New York: Viking, 1971], 272–73).

5. I. A. L. Diamond, "Darling! You Mean . . . ?", *Screen Writer* 4, no. 4 (September 1947): 7–8.

6. John Howard Lawson, *Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting*, 2nd ed. (New York: Putnam's 1949), 409.

7. The evidence that studio screenwriters thought in terms of three-act construction is spotty but suggestive. Most screenplays don't indicate these divisions, though some carry indications of large-scale "sequences." For a discussion of sequence construction in the sound era, see Steven Price, *A History of the Screenplay* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 123–54.

For evidence that some writers, including F. Scott Fitzgerald, were thinking in terms of "acts," see our blog entries "Caught in the Acts" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2014/05/18/caught-in-the-acts-2/ and "A Dose of DOS" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2012/12/17/a-dose-of-dos-trade

-secrets-from-selznick/. There are period references to three-act structure in Leo Rosten's *Hollywood: The Movie Colony, the Movie Makers* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1941), 233; Eugene Herman, *A Practical Manual of Screen Play Writing for Theater and Television Films* (Cleveland: World, 1952), 21–23, 58; and Charles Brackett's collected memoirs, *It's the Pictures That Got Small: Charles Brackett on Billy Wilder and Hollywood's Golden Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 158, 199, 225, 231, 308.

The four-part anatomy I employ here for analytical purposes comes from Kristin Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), chap. 1. It's discussed in my essay "Three Dimensions of Film Narrative," in *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 85–133, available at http://www.davidbordwell.net/books/poetics_03narrative.pdf. Other aspects of the theory are considered on our blogsite at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2008/06/21/times-go-by-turns/ and http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/anatomy.php.

Using statistical analysis of a great many films, psychologist James E. Cutting has offered powerful evidence that the four-part pattern prevails in feature-length films across Hollywood history. See "Narrative Theory and the Dynamics of Popular Movies," *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 3 May 2016, at http://link.springer.com/article/10.3758/s13423-016-1051-4.

8. Frances Marion advises screenwriters to develop "a secondary line of plot action that crosses and interweaves with the main line of action." It may involve minor characters or the protagonist. It has, she notes, a production advantage in that the principal actors can be off the set more. See Frances Marion, *How to Write and Sell Film Stories* (New York: Covici Friede, 1937), 53.

9. James M. Cain, "A Free Lance for Hollywood," *New Theatre*, 1947, 18.

10. Richard Levin, *The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

11. See Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, pts. 1 and 3; Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood*; David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 21–114; and the blog entry "Open Secrets of Classical Storytelling: Narrative Analysis 101" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2016/01/11/open-secrets-of-classical-storytelling-narrative-analysis-101/.

12. Matt Taylor, "Night of the Blizzard," *American Magazine*, January 1942, 115–31.

13. "Metro's 'Driven Woman' Story Deal Stalled," *Variety*, 30 April 1941, 20.

14. The book is Niven Busch's *They Dream of Home* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1944).

15. Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 149–66.

16. On the film's production see George F. Custen, *Twentieth Century's Fox: Darryl F. Zanuck and the Culture of Hollywood* (New York: Basic Books, 1997),

239–56, and Lea Jacobs, "Making John Ford's *How Green Was My Valley*," *Film History* 28, no. 2 (2016): 32–80.

17. William Saroyan, "Myself upon the Earth," in *The Saroyan Special: Selected Short Stories* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948), 3.

18. James Agee, *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, ed. Michael Sragow (New York: Library of America, 2005), 43.

19. Quoted in "With a Tinge of Awe," *New York Times*, 7 February 1943, X4. In this respect, *The Human Comedy* contrasts with Brown's 1935 essay in homespun Americana, *Ah, Wilderness!* That film's plot, following Eugene O'Neill's play, is driven by two courtships, one involving teenagers and the other centered on their elders.

20. Quoted in Philip K. Scheuer, "Town Called Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 February 1942, C3.

21. Kathryn Kane charts possible lines of action (victory/defeat, group formation/ group disintegration) in *Visions of War: Hollywood Combat Films of World War II* (Ann Arbor, MI: Arno Research Press, 1982), 131–33.

22. "*Air Force*," *Variety*, 3 February 1943, 14.

23. For a thorough account of changes in the combat genre, see Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), chap. 2.

24. For examples of recent films exploiting these schemas, see "Pick Your Protagonist(s)," at http: http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2016/01/09/pick-your-protagonists/.

INTERLUDE: SCHEMA AND REVISION, BETWEEN ROUNDS

1. Film historian Leger Grindon has called this "boxing's noir cycle." His *Knockout: The Boxer and Boxing in American Cinema* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011) is the definitive study of the genre, and it includes in-depth interpretations of several of the films discussed here.

2. "RKO Protests Fite Scene in Kramer's 'Champion,'" *Daily Variety*, 8 March 1949, 1; "Robson Explains about 'Set-Up,'" *Daily Variety*, 24 March 1949, 7; "See *Set-Up* Scoring Close Verdict over *Champion* in Suit," *Variety*, 11 May 1949, 2; "*Champion*, *Set-Up* Directors Merge," *Daily Variety*, 15 August 1949, 1; "Wise, Mark Robson Reactivate Aspen for UA Release," *Daily Variety*, 5 July 1951, 4.

CHAPTER 4

1. Charles Brackett, *It's the Pictures That Got Small: Charles Brackett on Billy Wilder and Hollywood's Golden Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 189.

2. There was a hybrid genre that integrated disparate numbers into a biographical review of a showman's career, as in *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1943), *Till the Clouds Roll By* (1947), and *Words and Music* (1948).

3. Bernard Shaw, "Preface," in *Three Plays by Brieux*, trans. Mrs. Bernard

Shaw et al. (New York: Brentano's, 1911), xv. The origin of the term *tranche de la vie* is in Jean Jullien, *Le théâtre vivant: Essai théorique et pratique* (Paris: Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1892), 11–13.

4. Literary historian Joseph Warren Beach called this modern variant of slice of life dramaturgy the "breadthwise cutting," because it slices not into a specific situation unfolding in time, however incompletely, but rather across several situations sharing a single moment (*The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique* [New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1932], 425–57).

5. The success of Baum's approach inspired the American "institutional" novel setting out to survey a milieu. Hartzell Spence's *Radio City* (1941), for instance, showed the interplay among radio programmers, sponsors, and ad agencies. Arthur Hailey would later make a brand of institutional fiction with *Hotel* (1965), *Airport* (1968), and other novels, some adapted to films on Grand Hotel lines. Another 1941 novel, *Storm*, by George R. Stewart, binds together several protagonists not through a setting but through the effects of a storm that spreads across the world in twelve days. With their snippets of radio reports, newspaper stories, and other scraps of information, these might be considered domestications of the modernist "epic" set out by Dos Passos in *Manhattan Transfer* and the *USA* trilogy. Going further back, it seems likely that Émile Zola originated this model in his cross sections of French life in *Le ventre de Paris* (produce market), *Au bonheur des dames* (department store), *L'argent* (stock exchange), and other novels.

6. Quoted in "Producer Discusses Picture," *New York Times*, 3 May 1931, X6.

7. Vicki Baum, *I Know What I'm Worth* (London: M. Joseph, 1964), 265.

8. On these films see Leo Meehan, "Musicomedy Comeback [*Luxury Liner*]," *Motion Picture Herald*, 21 January 1933, 28; "Captain Hates the Sea," *Variety*, 4 December 1934, 12; "Streamline Express," *Hollywood*, November 1935, 46; "Time Out for Romance," *Motion Picture Herald*, 20 February 1937, 42; and "Stagecoach," *Daily Variety*, 8 February 1939, 17.

9. For more on the vicissitudes of the Grand Hotel schema see "1932: MGM Invents the Future (Part 2)" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2015/03/22/1932-mgm-invents-the-future-part-2/.

10. The reviewer in *Daily Variety* noted that the script includes "five [*sic*] distinct combinations which have no bearing on one another," creating a "loosely woven" plot ("*Club Havana*," *Daily Variety*, 22 October 1945, 3). The reviewer duly recorded the resemblance to *Grand Hotel*.

11. Earlier films that set the ensemble plot in a nightclub are *Night World* (1932) and *Wonder Bar* (1934).

12. G. K., "New Feature Plot-Heavy," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 July 1940, A7; Bosley Crowther, "The Screen: At the Rialto," *New York Times*, 27 August 1940, 17. Several reviewers noted the debts to *Grand Hotel*.

13. "*Week-End at the Waldorf*," *Variety*, 25 July 1945, 20.

14. See my *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 94–102.

15. I survey this plotting option in "Mutual Friends and Chronologies of Chance," in *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 189–250. Peter Parshall's *Altman and After: Multiple Narratives in Film* (New York: Scarecrow, 2012) situates the trend in relation to other methods of linking distinct story lines.

16. André Bazin, "Theatre and Cinema—Part One," in *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 93.

17. Ibid., 115.

18. Elia Kazan, *A Life* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 384.

19. "*Rope* Is Ace Hitchcock Melo with Novel Touch," *Hollywood Reporter*, 26 August 1948, 3.

20. Henry James, "Preface to *The Wings of the Dove*," in *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (New York: Scribner's, 1934), 296.

21. Henry James, "Preface to *The Awkward Age*," in ibid., 110.

22. In an interesting revision of the parallel flashback schema, the film's first one is given before the crash, while another block consists of a pair of lying flashbacks.

23. See Philip T. Hartung, "Home Is Where You Hang Your Hat," *Commonweal*, 19 March 1943, 544.

24. On the four-part structure Welles planned, see Catherine L. Benamou, "*It's All True*": *Orson Welles's Pan-American Odyssey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 61–129.

25. According to screenwriter Ellis St. Joseph, the frame story was added by the studio after production. See Doug McClelland, *Forties Film Talk: Oral Histories of Hollywood, with 120 Lobby Posters* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992), 162.

26. *Variety* noted that *Tales of Manhattan* was able to come in at a budget of $1 million. "By selling the idea of making episodes, instead of an entire film, the producers were able to arrange comparatively low salary deals with the players. The same applied to the writers" ("*Tales of Manhattan*," *Variety*, 5 August 1942, 8).

27. Originally *Tales of Manhattan* was to have included a sequence showing W. C. Fields buying the coat in the secondhand shop after the lawyer segment. Fields thinks the wad of paper the derelict had put in the pocket consists of banknotes. He wears the coat to a temperance meeting in a mansion, where the annoyed husband spikes the coconut milk. The scene collapses in mass drunkenness. In the portions of this sequence that survive, there is no indication of how the coat gets back to the secondhand shop.

After a test preview, the producers decided to cut the Fields sequence as not in keeping with the rest of the film. See Thomas F. Brady, "Bulletins from Hollywood," *New York Times*, 3 May 1942, X3. The segment has been partially restored in some home video versions.

28. The financial pressures on Disney are discussed in Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 153–54; Mike Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in Its Golden Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 367–74; and Mike Barrier, *The*

Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 168–99.

INTERLUDE: MANKIEWICZ

1. On Sturges's in-jokes, see http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2013/05/27/on-the-more-or-less-plausible-sneakiness-of-one-preston-sturges/.

2. Quoted in David Shipman, "A Conversation with Joseph L. Mankiewicz," in *Joseph L. Mankiewicz Interviews*, ed. Brian Dauth (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 155.

3. See the memos from Zanuck quoted in Kenneth L. Geist, *Pictures Will Talk: The Life and Films of Joseph L. Mankiewicz* (New York: Scribner's, 1978), 145, 150.

4. Frank S. Nugent, "All about Joe," *Collier's*, 24 March 1951, 69.

5. Jacques Bontemps and Richard Overstreet, "Mesure pour mesure: Entretien avec Joseph L. Mankiewicz," *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 178 (May 1966): 39.

6. Quoted in Robert Coughlan, "Fifteen Authors in Search of a Character Named Joseph L. Mankiewicz" (1951), in Dauth, *Interviews*, 17.

7. A condensed version of the novel manages to jam eleven flashbacks into its thirteen double-column pages. See John Klempner, "A Letter to Five Wives," *Cosmopolitan*, August 1945, 67–93.

8. "A Letter to Five Wives," adaptation by Vera Caspary (first draft, May 28, 1947), 1. Vera Caspary Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society.

9. Mankiewicz's screenplay alters only one phrase of this prologue, turning Caspary's original into "any resemblance to you—or me—might be purely coincidental" ("A Letter to Three Wives," screenplay by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, final script, May 19, 1948, Vera Caspary Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society).

10. Quoted in Coughlan, "Fifteen Authors," 17.

11. Zanuck complained that the screenwriter-director got too much credit for the result. "Mankiewicz had a crack at this material and couldn't lick it. He gave it back to me after ten weeks. It wasn't till Siegel and Caspary came along that it came to life." Quoted in Geist, *Pictures Will Talk*, 145.

12. Apparently this emphasis was the result of Zanuck's advice. In a memo to Siegel and Caspary, he recommends making one character someone "who will crystallize the desire of the audience for happiness at the end of the picture." Deborah, he suggests, is the likely candidate. "By starting with her and ending with her, she can be our constant link." He also recommends making her a small-town girl rather than a sophisticate. See Darryl Zanuck, Memo to Sol Siegel, Vera Caspary, F. Hugh Herbert, and Molly Mandaville, 19 May 1947, Vera Caspary Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society.

13. Deborah's and Rita's flashbacks both return to them, in close-up, musing about their husbands' fidelity. But Lora Mae's flashback ends merely with a shot of the boat returning from the excursion. The narration doesn't revisit the specific situation that triggered her memories, the dripping pipe in the locker room. Crucially, Addie's ventriloquizing voice-over is missing as well. Before,

her voice's takeover of each wife's inner monologue was ominous; now perhaps Addie's absence is another hint that she has nabbed Porter.

14. An extract from the scene is available at http://www.davidbordwell.net/books/reinventing.php.

15. In the short story, Karen learns of Eve's perfidy through a tale recounted by her friend the star actress Margola. Margola has been betrayed by the girl who said she wanted only to serve her idol. After hearing the story, Karen carelessly tells her husband Lloyd that Eve might suit his new play. She does, and soon Eve is on the way to Hollywood with Lloyd. See Mary Orr, "The Wisdom of Eve," *Cosmopolitan*, May 1946, 72–75, 191–95. The Mankiewicz screenplay I have consulted is available on the Internet at www.dailyscript.com/scripts/all_about_eve.html. This is evidently the "shooting draft" that Zanuck allowed Mankiewicz to film. The version published in 1951 and reprinted in Joseph L. Mankiewicz, *More about "All about Eve": A Colloquy with Gary Carey* (New York: Random House, 1972), is a revised script that is quite close to the finished film, after the cuts demanded by Zanuck.

16. "What They Say about Eve Ain't So," *Life*, 30 October 1950, 79–80.

17. See Philip T. Hartung, "The Screen: There's Nothing Like a Dame," *Commonweal*, 27 October 1950, 62; John McCarten, "Bonanza for Bette," *New Yorker*, 21 October 1950, 128; Hollis Alpert, "The Case of Joseph L. Mankiewicz," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 21 October 1950, 31; "*Voyeur*," "The New Films," *Theatre Arts* 34, no. 12 (December 1950): 9.

18. Hartung, "Screen," 62.

19. Herman J. Mankiewicz carefully restricted characters' range of knowledge in each of the flashbacks in *Citizen Kane*. Joseph Mankiewicz curtly denied any influence from his brother's work. See Stone, "All about Joe," 182.

20. Sarah Kozloff discusses Addison as the controlling narrator in *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-Over Narration in American Fiction Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 65–69.

21. Strictly speaking, Karen's flashback at one point breaks with her range of knowledge, because after she and Lloyd leave Margo's dressing room the action there continues. Karen could not be remembering this portion of the scene. Mankiewicz may be jokingly referring to his maneuver in her departing voice-over: "Where were we going that night, Lloyd and I? Funny, the things you remember—and the things you don't."

22. For discussion of this replay, see "Innovation by Accident" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2013/09/10/innovation-by-accident/.

23. For a detailed appreciation of *The Honey Pot*, see Bernard F. Dick, *Joseph L. Mankiewicz* (Boston: Twayne, 1983), 69–75.

24. Michel Ciment, "Interview with Joseph L. Mankiewicz," in Dauth, *Interviews*, 129–30. Kenneth L. Geist fills in information on the Alexandria Quartet project in *Pictures Will Talk*, 305–8. See also Matthew Bernstein, *Walter Wanger: Hollywood Independent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 347–48.

25. Jeff Laffel, "Joseph L. Mankiewicz," in Dauth, *Interviews*, 199.

CHAPTER 5

1. Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (New York: Viking, 1957), 251.

2. Quoted in Robert Coughlan, "Fifteen Authors in Search of a Character Named Joseph L. Mankiewicz" (1951), in *Joseph L. Mankiewicz: Interviews*, ed. Brian Dauth (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 15.

3. For example, one article points out the different effects of gradually revealing to the viewer something the characters already know, revealing something known to a few characters, revealing something to characters and the viewer at the same moment, and revealing to the audience something none of the characters know. See William Seril, "Film Suspense and Revelation," *Screen Writer* 3, no. 5 (October 1947): 7–9.

4. Eugene Vale, *The Technique of Screenplay Writing* (New York: DeVorss, 1944), 75. Vale was the pen name of Herman Weissman, and under that name he wrote the screenplay for *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1944).

5. The term omniscient, though it's conventional, isn't really accurate. In any particular narrative we don't really know everything in godlike fashion. The narration is presented as omniscient in principle: it could give us access to everything, but it doesn't. The better but more unwieldy term would be very unrestricted narration.

6. Quoted in George Stevens Jr., *Conversations with the Great Moviemakers of Hollywood's Golden Age at the American Film Institute* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 119.

7. See my discussion in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), chap. 5.

8. For a film extract from this scene, see the blog entry "Little Things Mean a Lot: Micro-stylistics" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2014/11/12/little-things-mean-a-lot-micro-stylistics/.

9. Quoted in Charles Osborne, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie: A Biographical Companion to the Works of Agatha Christie* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 45.

10. An extract from the scene is available at http://www.davidbordwell.net/books/reinventing.php.

11. For an analysis of this scene, see the blog entry "Play It Again, Joan" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2011/10/25/play-it-again-joan/.

12. See the web essay "The Hook: Scene Transitions in Classical Cinema" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/hook.php.

13. I discuss the misleading hooks in *You Only Live Once* in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 81–82.

14. Joseph Warren Beach, *American Fiction, 1920–1940* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 5.

15. Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood, the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movies* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950), 71–72,

16. Herb Golden, "Hollywood as 'Dream Factory' Just Nightmare to Femme Anthropologist," *Variety*, 18 October 1950, 18.

17. Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, *Movies: A Psychological Study* (1950; New York: Atheneum, 1970), 19–33.

18. Barbara Deming, *Running Away from Myself: A Dream Portrait of America Drawn from the Films of the 40's* (New York: Grossman, 1969), 8–38.

19. See Parker Tyler, *The Hollywood Hallucination* (New York: Creative Age, 1944), and idem, *Magic and Myth of the Movies* (New York: Holt, 1947). I discuss Tyler's critical views in *The Rhapsodes: How 1940s Critics Changed American Film Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), chap. 6.

20. Gilbert Seldes, *The Movies Come from America* (New York: Scribner's, 1937), 65–67.

21. Len Zinberg, *What D'Ya Know for Sure* (New York: Doubleday, 1947), 247.

22. Richard Brooks, *The Producer* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), 130.

23. Erving Goffman, *Strategic Interaction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969), 13.

24. For more on *Daisy Kenyon*'s opacity about motives and goals, see Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 165–73.

INTERLUDE: IDENTITY THIEVES AND TANGLED NETWORKS

1. Anthony Gilbert, *The Woman in Red* (New York: Smith and Durrell, 1943).

2. For background on the radio play, see Richard J. Hand, *Terror on the Air! Horror Radio in America, 1931–1952* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 65–68.

3. Roberto Rossellini adopts this strategy in *L'amore*, an adaptation of Jean Cocteau's 1930 play *La voix humaine.* Interestingly, *L'amore* was released in 1948, the same year as *Sorry, Wrong Number*.

CHAPTER 6

1. Quoted in Mel Gussow, *Don't Say Yes Until I Finish Talking* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 94.

2. Lea Jacobs, "The Innovation of Re-recording in the Hollywood Studios," *Film History* 24, no. 1 (2012): 28–29.

3. See the discussions of *Now, Voyager* and *Rebecca* in James Buhler, David Neumeyer, and Rob Deemer, *Hearing the Movies: Music and Sound in Film History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 218–24.

4. "Why *100 Men and a Girl* Makes a Hit on Screen," *American Cinematographer* 18, no. 11 (November 1937): 453, 458–60.

5. For discussions of these innovations, see Katharine Seymour and J. T. W. Martin, *Practical Radio Writing: The Technique of Writing for Broadcasting Simply and Thoroughly Explained* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1938), 30–55; Erik Barnouw, *Handbook of Radio Writing: An Outline of Techniques and Markets in Radio Writing in the United States,* 2nd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1942), 4–17,

112–17; Leonard Maltin, *The Great American Broadcast: A Celebration of Radio's Golden Age* (New York: Dutton, 1997), 82, 103–4.

6. The prime early example in a fiction series is *The Witch's Tale* (1931–38).

7. Quoted in "*The Shadow* Talks," *New York Times*, 14 August 1938, 136. For a detailed discussion of Welles's innovations, see Shawn VanCour, "Revisiting 'War of the Worlds': First-Person Narration in Golden Age Radio Drama," in *Orson Welles: Stage, Sound, Screen, and Society*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb and James Gilmore (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2017).

8. Selznick letter to Alfred Hitchcock, 12 December 1938, David O. Selznick Papers, Harry Ransom Research Center, University of Texas—Austin.

9. Early versions of the screenplay did frame the action neatly. See Dan Auiler, *Hitchcock's Notebooks: An Authorized and Illustrated Look Inside the Creative Mind of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Avon, 1999), 29, 61.

10. *Variety* claimed that *Stanley* and *Roaring Twenties* borrowed the narrating technique of shorts and documentaries "to enliven montage" ("Producers Borrow Briefie Idea for Features," *Variety*, 30 October 1939, 222). Another source comments that in *Stanley*, "unfortunately, the general effect was too much that of a travelogue." See Jerry Wald and Richard Macauley, *Best Pictures 1939–1940, and the Year Book of Motion Pictures in America* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1940), 334.

11. Fox also claimed that *How Green* was the first sound picture to have commentary over scenes that were designed as silent ones (as opposed, presumably, to the way *Stanley and Livingston* uses voice-over during passages of stock footage). See "Hollywood Inside," *Daily Variety*, 9 October 1941, 2.

12. "*Portrait of Jennie* Story Conference," 29 April 1947, 1–2; David B. Hempstead, "*Portrait of Jennie* One Line Continuity," 5 May 1947, 1; and "*Portrait of Jennie* New Continuity," 7 May 1949, 1, David O. Selznick Papers, Harry Ransom Center.

13. "Daniel Mainwaring: Americana," in *Backstory 2: Interviews with Screenwriters of the 1940s and 1950s*, ed. Patrick McGilligan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 199.

14. Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 345.

15. Buddy Adler, quoted in "Documentary Technique Good for About Any Type Film," *Hollywood Reporter*, 17 June 1948, 13.

16. An extract from the scene is available at http://www.davidbordwell.net/books/reinventing.php.

17. Both *Show Boat* and *Annie Get Your Gun* were made by MGM, the studio that produced *The Miniver Story*. The company probably had rights to the tunes, and Clem's mention of them serves to promote the screen adaptations, *Annie* already released in 1950 and *Show Boat* forthcoming in 1951.

18. I defend this convention of mimicking parts of the communicative chain in "Three Dimensions of Film Narrative," in *Poetics of Cinema* (New York:

Routledge, 2007), 45, available online at http://www.davidbordwell.net/books/poetics_03narrative.pdf. See as well my "Reply to Joseph Magliano, Paisley Livingston, and Brian Boyd," in *Projections* 10, no. 1 (Summer 2016): 25–38.

19. Something similar happens in Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* (1999), which employs Ricky Jay as narrator in the prologue only to have him reappear as a minor character in the main story. Compare the gnomish librarian in Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012).

20. Gavin Lambert, *GWTW: The Making of "Gone with the Wind"* (New York: Bantam, 1976), 115.

21. *Hold Back the Dawn*, screenplay by Brackett and Wilder, 7 February 1941, Ketti Frings Collection, Wisconsin State Historical Society.

22. Ed Sikov, *On Sunset Boulevard: The Life and Times of Billy Wilder* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), 283–84. Sikov reports (314) that for *Ace in the Hole* (1951) Wilder planned to introduce the protagonist as a talking corpse.

23. Brooks Atkinson, "The Play: *Lily of the Valley*," *New York Times*, 27 January 1942, 25.

24. Ray Collins, a well-known radio voice as well as a Welles player who went on to a long Hollywood career, plays both Matthew Macauley and Wallau. He seems to have been the go-to man for solid afterlife voice-over.

25. I'm indebted to Neil Verma for information about this narrative device in radio plays.

26. There is a partial suggestion of a dream in the film's most famous scene. McPherson is becoming obsessed with Laura, and after drinking heavily he falls asleep in her apartment. The camera tracks slowly in on him as he drops off. There's the noise of a door from offscreen, and Laura walks in. McPherson is astonished. *Laura*, released the same week as *The Woman in the Window*, might seem to be playing with the possibility that McPherson dreams of Laura's return to life. Kristin Thompson has traced the numerous dialogue motifs that reinforce this implication. As things turn out, McPherson isn't dreaming, but as with Waldo's voice-over narration, the scene's cues are somewhat equivocal. See Kristin Thompson, "Closure within a Dream? Point of View in *Laura*," in *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 162–94.

27. For what it's worth, both the original shooting script and the revision distinguish between lines marked as "WALDO'S VOICE (narrating)" and "WALDO's VOICE" for offscreen delivery. In neither version is Waldo's dying line marked as "narrating." And in neither do we get an indication of the final camera movement that lets Laura and McPherson leave the shot in order to target the shattered clock face. Yet we do have a sonic texture in the last line that is closer to a narrator's voice. See "Laura, Shooting Final April 18, 1944," screenplay by Jay Dratler, Ring Lardner Jr., Samuel Hoffenstein, and Betty Reinhardt, Script Collection, Margaret Herrick Library.

INTERLUDE: REMAKING MIDDLEBROW MODERNISM

1. T. C. Worsley, "Poetry without Words," in "*Death of a Salesman": Text and Criticism*, ed. Gerald Weales (New York: Viking, 1967), 227.

2. Jo Mielziner, "Designing a Play: *Death of a Salesman*," in Weales, "*Death of a Salesman,*" 190. Miller notes only that "the play was sometimes called cinematographic in its structure" ("Introduction to Collected Plays," in Weales, "*Death of a Salesman,*" 159).

3. As an extreme case, Philip Barry's *Foolish Notion* (1945) required actors to walk backward to signal that a fantasy scene was starting. See "*Foolish Notion*: A Comedy in Three Acts," in *The Best Plays of 1944–1945*, ed. Burns Mantle (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1945), 298–325.

4. In addition, all the scenes occurring in the city are played on the forestage (Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* [New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1948]), 5.

5. For a contemporary account of the staging of the Broadway production, see "*Death of a Salesman*: A Play in Two Acts," in *The Best Plays of 1948–1949*, ed. Burns Mantle (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1949), 53–87. A more detailed account of all aspects of the production is in Brenda Murphy, *Miller: "Death of a Salesman"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chap. 1.

6. See the passage quoted in Lásló Benedek, "Play into Picture," *Sight and Sound* 22, no. 4 (October-December 1952): 83.

7. Miller, "Introduction to *Collected Plays*," 156. See also Daniel E. Schneider, "Play of Dreams," *Theatre Arts Magazine* 33, no. 10 (October 1949): 18–271, in which Schneider maintains that the play's daydreams are actually "the return of the repressed."

8. Quoted in Benedek, "Play into Picture," 83.

9. Quoted in Murphy, *Miller: "Death of a Salesman*," 34.

10. Lásló Benedek, "Directing *Death of a Salesman* for the Screen," *Theatre Arts* 36, no. 1 (January 1952): 37.

11. Benedek, "Play into Pictures," 83.

12. Benedek may also have been trumped by Curtis Bernhardt's film *Payment on Demand* (1951), which contains flashback sequences introduced and concluded with lighting changes in the Mielziner manner. Had Benedek tried these techniques so soon after the other film's release, he might have been branded too derivative.

13. Benedek, "Play into Pictures," 84.

14. Miller, "Introduction to *Collected Plays*," 159–60.

15. See the critics' reviews gathered in Weales, *Death of a Salesman*, 199–258. The reviewers often apply the term flashback in its standard sense, and none indicate awareness of the momentary reshapings of Willy's memory that Miller sought to convey. See also Lee Rogow, "*Death of a Salesman* Dramatic Masterpiece," *Hollywood Reporter*, 10 December 1951, 3. The *Variety* review, however, hints at the mingling of memory and fantasy; see "*Death of a Salesman*," *Variety*, 12 December 1951, 6.

16. Quoted in Victoria Stewart, "An Experiment with Narrative? Rumer Godden's *A Fugue in Time*," in *Rumer Godden: International and Intermodern Storyteller*, ed. Lucy Le-Guilcher and Phyllis B. Lassner (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 81. Stewart points out that Godden's concern with layered time was shared by other writers of the period, notably John Buchan and J. B. Priestley.

17. Jonathan Frey analyzes the tense patterns of Godden's novel in detail in "Past or Present Tense? A Note on the Technique of Narration," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 46, no. 2 (April 1947): 205–8. He comments that in their responses to the novel, reviewers found no difficulty in following the action.

18. Rumer Godden, *Take Three Tenses: A Fugue in Time* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1945), 174.

19. Godden, *Take Three Tenses*, 3.

CHAPTER 7

1. Parker Tyler, *Magic and Myth of the Movies* (New York: Holt, 1947), 146–47.

2. Herb A. Lightman, "The Subjective Camera," *American Cinematographer* 27, no. 2 (February 1946): 46.

3. Harold J. Salemson, "The Camera as Narrator—Technique or Toy," *Screen Writer* 2, no. 10 (March 1947): 38.

4. Lightman, "Subjective Camera," 67.

5. Rudy Belhmer, *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck: The Golden Years at Twentieth Century-Fox* (New York: Grove, 1993), 71.

6. David Goodis, *Behold This Woman* (New York: Bantam, 1948), 61.

7. Oboler, notes Leonard Maltin, sought an "intimate, in-the-mind sort of radio." See Leonard Maltin, *The Great American Broadcast: A Celebration of Radio's Golden Age* (New York: Dutton, 1997), 48.

8. King Vidor, "Bringing *Pulham* to the Screen," in *Hollywood Directors, 1941–1976*, ed. Richard Koszarski (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 36.

9. King Vidor, *A Tree Is a Tree* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953), 250.

10. Vidor, "Bringing *Pulham*," 38.

11. Quoted in Nancy Dowd and David Shepard, *King Vidor* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1988), 188. See also Vidor, *Tree Is a Tree*, 251.

12. An extract from the scene is available at http://www.davidbordwell.net/books/reinventing.php.

13. Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 89.

14. Lightman, "Subjective Camera," 46, 66. See also Irving Pichel, "Seeing with the Camera" (1946), in *Hollywood Directors, 1941–1976*, ed. Richard Koszarski (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 75–76.

15. Quoted in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, ed. Dorothy Gardiner and Kathrine Sorley Walker (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 132.

16. As often happens, there is a 1930s precedent: the flamboyant POV opening of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1932).

17. We do see it in a photograph, clearly establishing that it isn't the Bogart face we'll see later.

18. In the French tradition, *monologue intérieure* was the term for what Anglo-Saxon critics call stream of consciousness. See Édouard Dujardin, *The Bays Are Sere* and *Interior Monologue*, trans. Anthony Suter (London: Libris, 1991), 113. Compare the discussions in Melvin Friedman, *Stream of Consciousness: A Study in Literary Method* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1955), chaps. 1 and 2, and Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 3–17.

19. To this day mainstream fiction uses italics to signal thoughts, and the convention is so ingrained that tags like "he thought" are often dropped. On the untagged inner monologue, see Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 58–62.

20. Faith Baldwin, *Skyscraper* (1931; Dell, 1948), 173.

21. Mignon G. Eberhart, *The Man Next Door* (1942; Dell, n.d.), 31.

22. Gerald Butler, *Slippery Hitch* (1949; Dell, n.d.), 129.

23. Philip Moeller, "Drama Makes Regular Stops," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 March 1929, C14.

24. On Welles's use of voice-over for subjectivity, see Neil Verma, *Theater of the Mind: Imagination, Aesthetics, and American Radio Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 61–62. Arch Oboler explains his conception of stream of consciousness as "dramatically portraying the actual thoughts in the mind of a person" in *Fourteen Radio Plays* (New York: Random House, 1949), 8. In practice it is much like the "inner monologue" of literature, as Luther Philip Weaver points out in *The Technique of Radio Writing* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1948), 253. Some of Oboler's dramas, notably "The Ugliest Man in the World" (1939), occasionally display the fragmentary quality of literary stream of consciousness.

25. See the blog entry on *Strange Interlude* at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2015/03/08/1932-mgm-invents-the-future-part-1/.

26. It's likely that the rise of the "inner dialogue" convention in film influenced screenwriter Donald Ogden Stewart's play *How I Wonder* (1947), in which an astronomer conducts conversations with himself about nuclear war.

27. Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 188–227.

28. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Modern Library, 1961), 183. For comments on this alternation see Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 62–66.

29. Hannah Lees and Lawrence Bachmann, *Death in the Doll's House* (New York: Dell, 1949), 44.

30. The plays are Parker W. Fennelly's *Cuckoos on the Hearth* (1941) and Philip Barry's *A Foolish Notion* (1945). Already mentioned is Irwin Shaw's play *Sons and Soldiers* (1943), in which a pregnant woman imagines the life ahead of

her unborn child. An earlier, better-known example is J. B. Priestley's *Time and the Conways* (US premiere 1938), in which a game of charades leads to visions of a family's failure twenty years later.

31. I discuss this tactic in greater detail in "*Nightmare Alley*: Do We Hear What He Hears?" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2015/09/30/nightmare-alley-do-we-hear-what-he-hears/.

32. An extract from this sequence is available at http://www.davidbordwell.net/books/reinventing.php.

33. Dorrit Cohn makes this point in *Transparent Minds*, 77–79.

CHAPTER 8

1. William R. Weaver, "*The Guilt of Janet Ames*," *Motion Picture Daily*, 5 March 1947, 8.

2. Keith Sward, "Boy and Girl Meet Neurosis," *Screen Writer* 4, no. 3 (September 1948): 8.

3. Ibid., 26.

4. Richard Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On? The American Home Front, 1941–1945* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1970), 218–91.

5. Mignon G. Eberhart, *With This Ring* (New York: Dell, 1941), 5. The 1938 novel *Rebecca* may have provided a model for this and other romantic thrillers by indicating in its first line that the Manderley estate haunts the heroine's sleep.

6. Charles Jackson, *The Lost Weekend* (1944; New York: Vintage, 2013), 154–65.

7. The dream sequence in *Applause* (1929) is a famous exception, all the more interesting in that it's presented in the manner of a silent-film montage. A crazier mélange of dreams occurs in the B film *The Sin of Nora Moran* (1933).

8. Screenwriter Noel Langley takes credit for adding the Kansas frame and the parallel characters to the original novel. See Lucie Neville, "So It Wasn't Like the Book, Huh?" *Arizona Independent Republic*, 19 February 1939, 118.

9. Both these films derive their dream-parallel structures from stage plays. *Du Barry Was a Lady* premiered in 1939, the same year as *The Wizard of Oz*, and *Cabin in the Sky* opened in 1941. It may be that *The Wizard* made Hollywood filmmakers more receptive to this narrative pattern.

10. Philip K. Scheuer wrote that "the censor boys have made no attempt to minimize the unnatural affection of the younger Quincey sister, Letty, for her brother." "Uncle Harry Affair Meets Strange End," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 September 1945, A5.

11. In the source of *The Woman in the Window*, J. H. Wallis's novel *Once Off Guard* (1942), Wanley undergoes several elaborate and grotesque dreams; one could argue that he becomes somewhat addicted to them. In one scene Wanley visits a movie theater, and while the films are screened he tries to telepathically visualize the woman killing the man they are going to frame. Although it seems unlikely that these passages shaped the decision to add the dream device—one that screenwriter Nunnally Johnson opposed, preferring the suicide ending—

they have a peculiar resonance with the finished film, in a manner not unlike what happens with *The Chase* (see below, page 331). See Tom Stempel, *Screenwriter: The Life and Times of Nunnally Johnson* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1980), 90–91, 113.

12. An extract from this sequence is available at http://www.davidbordwell.net/books/reinventing.php.

13. "*Blind Alley*," *Variety*, 26 April 1939, 12.

14. See Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folk-Tales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*, vol. 6 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958), 228. Freud provided psychoanalytical accounts of some of these motifs in "Dreams in Folklore" (1911), written with David Ernst Oppenheim, and "The Occurrence in Dreams of Material from Fairy Tales," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud, vol. 12, *The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique, and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 177–203, 279–87.

15. Originally an episode omitted from *Flesh and Fantasy* (1943), *Destiny* was expanded to feature length. See "*Destiny*," *Variety*, 13 December 1944, 8. The added scenes in the first part of the film strengthen the dream motif by inserting the story of Cliff's mother's death and showing him recoiling from the song "I'll See You in My Dreams."

16. The most extensive survey of the rise of American psychoanalysis is Nathan G. Hale, *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States: Freud and the Americans, 1917–1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). For accounts of treatment of psychoanalysis in popular culture, see Lawrence R. Samuel, *Shrink: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013).

17. Michael Sragow, *Victor Fleming: An American Movie Master* (New York: Pantheon, 2008), 369–71.

18. "Speaking of Pictures. . . . These Freudian Montage Shots Show Mental State of Jekyll Changing to Hyde," *Life*, 25 August 1941, 14–15.

19. See Ed Sikov, *On Sunset Boulevard: The Life and Times of Billy Wilder* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), 228.

20. Hale, *Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States*, 277–80.

21. Mary Kiersch, *Curtis Bernhardt: A Directors Guild of America Oral History* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1986), 137.

22. Krin Gabbard and Glen O. Gabbard survey presentations of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts in the era's films in *Psychiatry and the Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 35–74.

23. Quoted in Frank Brady, *Citizen Welles: A Biography of Orson Welles* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 285. See also Laura Mulvey, "*Citizen Kane*," in *Orson Welles's Citizen Kane: A Casebook*, ed. James Naremore (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 220. For an example of a Freudian dollar book, see Fritz Wittels, *Interpreting Your Dreams* (New York: Home Institute, 1936).

24. Sward, "Boy and Girl Meet Neurosis," 8–10, 24–26.

25. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Last Tycoon: An Unfinished Novel*, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York: Scribner's, 1947), 147.

26. Detective stories' convention of the least-likely culprit can recruit the borderline cases defined by psychotherapy to justify how well criminals concealed their impulses. See Samuel Rogers, "A Plea for the Madman," *Writer* 59, no. 7 (July 1946): 228. Dorothy Sayers accurately predicted that psychoanalysis would lend a new impetus to horror stories. See "Introduction," in *Third Omnibus of Crime* (New York: Blue Ribbon, 1935), 6.

27. Karen Horney, *New Ways in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1937), 232–45.

28. *Methinks the Lady* is the source for the 1950 thriller *Whirlpool*, which considerably simplifies both the plot and the narrational texture.

29. William Menninger, "An Analysis of Psychoanalysis," *New York Times Magazine*, 18 May 1942, 50; Sigmund Freud, "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy (1909)," in *Standard Edition*, vol. 10, *Two Case Histories* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 122. On other psychoanalytic conventions transposed to film, see Gabbard and Gabbard, *Psychiatrist*, 27–33, 58–59.

30. Marc Vernet, "Freud: Effets spéciaux—Mise en scène: USA," *Communications* 23 (1975): 233.

31. Horney, *New Ways in Psychoanalysis*, 289.

32. "*Possessed*," *Variety*, 4 June 1947, 16; "*Mine Own Executioner*," *Daily Variety*, 7 June 1948, 3.

33. Bruce McClurg, "The Saga of *Lady in the Dark*," and "Weill . . . Gershwin . . . Hart . . . The Creators Remember," in "*Lady in the Dark*": A *Sourcebook*, ed. Bruce McClurg, Joanna Lee, and Kim Kowalke (New York: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, 1997), ii-iii, 7.

34. See McClurg, Lee, and Kowalke, "*Lady in the Dark*": A *Sourcebook*, 4.

35. "Metro Plans More Super-Short Pix," *Daily Variety*, 27 August 1945, 1.

36. "'Alter Ego,'" Oboler wrote, "is definitely a play indigenous to the radio form. In no other medium could the 'two mind system' existing in the same body be portrayed so effectively" ("*Ivory Tower*" *and Other Radio Plays* [Chicago: Targ, 1940], 58).

37. The film was vetted by Selznick's analyst Dr. May Romm, a popular Hollywood psychoanalyst who consulted on several Selznick productions. See David Thomson, *Showman: The Life of David O. Selznick* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 422–29, as well as Stephen Farber and Marc Green, *Hollywood on the Couch: A Candid Look at the Overheated Love Affair between Psychiatrists and Moviemakers* (New York: Morrow, 1993), 49–51.

38. Ronald Haver, *David O. Selznick's Hollywood* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 346. William Cameron Menzies participated in the final designs for the sequence, and his fascination with exaggerated deep and sharp imagery suited the task. See Haver, *Selznick's Hollywood,* 347, and David Bordwell, "William Cameron Menzies: One Forceful, Impressive Idea" at http://www.davidbordwell

.net/essays/menzies.php. Haver offers a useful discussion of other aspects of the production as well.

39. The shooting script treats the scene more hopefully. When Dean puts his hand into Louise's, she grips his tightly. *Possessed*, Revised Final Shooting Script, by Sylvia Richards and Ranald MacDougall (5 June 1946), 163, United Artists Collection, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.

40. The brevity of these shots probably owes something to studio head Darryl F. Zanuck's belief that films should move quickly. In a memo he urges that the silent scenes should last "only long enough to cover the length of the [voice-over] narration. In making semidocumentary films, I have found that audiences will accept concentrated action in scenes over which there is narration." See *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck: The Golden Years at Twentieth Century–Fox*, ed. Rudy Behlmer (New York: Grove, 1993), 125.

41. Thomas M. Pryor, "Of Litvak and the 'Pit,'" *New York Times*, 7 November 1948, X5. See also "Hollywood Briefs," *New York Times*, 7 September 1947, X3.

42. Rudy Behlmer, *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck*, 125.

43. The anti-Semitism castigated in the original play was transposed to prejudice against African Americans.

44. "*Possessed*," *Daily Variety*, 29 May 1947, 3.

45. Gabbard and Gabbard, *Psychiatry and Cinema*, 75–106.

INTERLUDE: INNOVATION BY MISADVENTURE

1. Quoted in James Curtis, *Between Flops: A Biography of Preston Sturges* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982), 172.

2. For more on *The Great Moment*, see http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2013/09/10/innovation-by-accident/.

3. *Desire Me*, scripts on file in the Turner/MGM Script Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles. Thanks to Peter Labuza for his assistance.

4. See the reviews collected in "*The Woman in the Window*," *New York Film Critics' Reviews* 2, no. 2 (29 January 1945): 484–85.

5. Philip K. Scheuer, "Fritz Lang Gets Hep to Box Office," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 October 1945, B2.

6. Fred Stanley, "Hollywood Drops Gang Films," *New York Times*, 19 August 1945, X3.

7. A sampling of responses is Irving Hoffman, "Critics Vent Wrath at Hays Code for *Uncle Harry* End: Even Cash Patrons Frown on Finale," *Hollywood Reporter*, 27 August 1945, 8.

8. Bosley Crowther, "The Screen: *Uncle Harry*, Taken from Stage Melodrama," *New York Times*, 24 August 1945, 14.

9. For a detailed exploration of this alternative version, see "In pursuit of *The Chase*" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2016/08/28/in-pursuit-of-the-chase/and "Back on the Trail of *The Chase*," at http://www.davidbordwell.et/blog/2016/11/01/back-on-the-trail-of-the-chase. The original script fol-

lowed the shipboard reunion with an epilogue showing Chuck married to Lorna and back in the navy. The kiss in the carriage replaces this sequence, which may never have been shot.

10. "Hollywood Inside," *Daily Variety*, 16 September 1946, 2.

11. "*The Guilt of Janet Ames*," *Daily Variety*, 5 March 1947, 3; "*The Guilt of Janet Ames*," *Variety*, 5 March 1947, 8.

12. An extract from this sequence is available at http://www.davidbordwell.net/books/reinventing.php.

13. "*The Guilt of Janet Ames*," *Variety*, 5 March 1947, 8.

14. "*The Guilt of Janet Ames*," *Hollywood Reporter*, 5 March 1947, 15.

CHAPTER 9

1. Quoted in Bob Thomas, *King Cohn: The Life and Times of Hollywood Mogul Harry Cohn* (Beverly Hills, CA: New Millennium, 2000), 172.

2. Philip K. Scheuer, "Movie Realism at Peak in 1948," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 December 1948, D1. Scheuer added that 1947 was no less remarkable on this front.

3. Tino Balio, *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946–1973* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), chap. 2.

4. Len Zinberg, *What D'Ya Know for Sure* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1947), 77. Along similar lines, a character in Richard Brooks's *The Producer* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1951) claims that English and Italian imports are worthy and profitable, but another character rebuts him: "They cost peanuts and they bring in peanuts" (49).

5. Otis Ferguson, "Life Goes to the Pictures," in *The Film Criticism of Otis Ferguson*, ed. Robert Wilson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1971), 3.

6. James Agee, *Film Writing and Selected Journalism* (New York: Library of America, 2005), 284.

7. I discuss Tyler's views in *The Rhapsodes: How 1940s Critics Changed American Film Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), chap. 6.

8. Walter B. Pitkin and William Moulton Marston, *The Art of Sound Pictures* (New York: Appleton, 1930), 45.

9. H. H. Dunn, "New Giant Movies," *Popular Mechanics* 53, no. 5 (May 1930): 706; Barrett C. Kiesling, *Talking Pictures: How They Are Made, How to Appreciate Them* (Richmond, VA: Johnson, 1937), 185.

10. Perry Ferguson, "More Realism from 'Rationed' Sets?" *American Cinematographer* 23, no. 9 (September 1942): 390–91.

11. Joseph A. Valentine, "Using an Actual Town instead of Movie Sets," *American Cinematographer* 23, no. 10 (October 1942): 440–41, 461–62.

12. Henry Hathaway, "Technically Correct," *Hollywood Reporter*, 5 November 1945, n.p.

13. Location shooting in New York boomed partly because the city streamlined the permit process and induced local unions to promise a five-year mora-

torium on jurisdictional disputes. See A. H. Raskin, "Movie Unions Sign Peace Pact Here; City to Aid Industry," *New York Times*, 28 August 1947, 1.

14. Raymond Fielding, *The March of Time, 1935–1951* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 43–81.

15. Captain R. L. Ramsey, "Field Camera Problems," *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* 41, no. 3 (September 1943): 240–44.

16. Quoted in Fred Stanley, "Hollywood Faces Facts," *New York Times*, 18 June 1944, X3.

17. Quoted in "20th Skeds Factual News Dramas in Film Innovation," *Daily Variety*, 27 February 1945, 1, 22.

18. Rudi Behlmer, ed., *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck: The Golden Years at Twentieth Century–Fox* (New York: Grove, 1993), 87, 122.

19. I discuss *Little Tokyo* and other anti-Japanese films in "The Enemy Next Door" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2013/08/08/the-enemy-next-door/.

20. "Flood of Documentaries Due," *Hollywood Reporter*, 19 February 1948, 1, 8.

21. See Leroy Lad Panek, *The American Police Novel: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003), 33–50. George N. Dove's *The Police Procedural* (Bowling Green, KY: Popular Press, 1982) is the best survey of the genre I know.

22. For a comprehensive survey going back to the 1930s, see Haden Guest, "The Police Procedural Film: Law and Order in the American Cinema, 1930–1960" (PhD diss., University of Southern California at Los Angeles, 2005).

23. "Flood of Documentaries Due," 1.

24. "Cops and Robbers Go Fancy," *Daily Variety*, 25 October 1948, 378.

25. Fox publicity announced that de Rochemont's second project, a film about a civilian adjusting to naval warfare, was to have been adapted from William Chambliss's 1944 novelette *Boomerang*. That film wasn't made. Why the title was transferred to this crime film is unclear. See "20th Skeds Factual News Dramas," 22.

26. The prologue was added after protest by New York's mayor. See "O'Dwyer Burn Salved on Film Stinging N.Y.," *Variety*, 7 June 1950, 1, 60.

27. "New Film Cycle Inspired by Race Prejudice Theme," *Hollywood Reporter*, 13 June 1947, 1, 6.

28. "Truman 'Rewrites' H'wood Scripting as Pix Lean to Social Significance," *Variety*, 19 January 1949, 1, 52.

29. For discussion of this trend see William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

30. On experimental tendencies in 1930s-40s radical fiction, see Walter B. Rideout, *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900–1954: Some Interrelations of Literature and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 208–24; Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929–1941* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 362–441.

31. President Harry Truman's 1948 executive order desegregating the

armed forces may also have encouraged liberal-minded storytellers to examine racial prejudice.

32. This argument is developed at length in Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy, *The Hollywood Social Problem Film: Madness, Despair, and Politics from the Depression to the Fifties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981).

33. Pearl Latteier, "The Hollywood Social Problem Film, 1946–1959" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2010), 36–50.

34. See Harrison Smith, "The Rise of Fantasy in Literature," *American Scholar* 17, no. 3 (July 1948): 306–11.

35. T. E. Dikty, "Fantasy Is Here to Stay," *Antiquarian Bookman*, 26 June 1948, 1109, 1118; "The Growth of Science-Fiction and Fantasy Publishing in Book Form," *Publishers Weekly* 154 (25 December 1948): 2464–69.

36. The plays are Ralph Nelson's *The Wind Is Ninety*, Harry Kleiner's *Skydrift*, and Leslie Floyd Egbert and Gertrude Ogden Tubby's *A Boy Who Lived Twice*.

37. "The Wizard of Oz," *Variety*, 16 August 1939, 14. Even juvenile fantasy literature was considered a poor commercial prospect. See Phyllis A. Whitney, "Why Not Fantasy?" *Writer* 63, no. 4 (April 1950): 107–9.

38. Aljean Harmetz, *The Making of "The Wizard of Oz"* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013), 288.

39. "Roxy, N.Y.," *Variety*, 13 March 1940, 40; "Twentieth Century–Fox: *Blue Bird*," *Motion Picture Herald*, 6 July 1949, 40.

40. "*Cabin in the Sky*," *Variety*, 10 February 1943, 9.

41. "All-Time Top Grossers," *Variety*, 18 January 1950, 18. *Snow White*'s reissue outgrossed more recent Disney releases and attracted unusual interest among adults. See Eric Hoyt, *Hollywood Vault: Film Libraries before Home Video* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 107.

42. Publisher Melvin Korshak could not convince producers of the virtues of science fiction until Howard Hawks acquired the story that became *The Thing from Another World* (1951). See Paul S. Nathan, "Books into Films," *Publishers Weekly*, 20 May 1950, 2178. For a detailed account of the emergence of this genre in the early 1950s, see Bradley Schauer, *Escape Velocity: American Science Fiction Film, 1950–1982* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2016).

43. In literature the premise goes back to the 1882 novel *Vice Versa*, in which father and son exchange places. After Smith's novel, the schema was recast by P. G. Wodehouse in *Laughing Gas* (1936) and in the Broadway play *If I Were You* (1938).

44. "Selznick Pays $55,000 for *The Star Wagon*," *Daily Variety*, 7 January 1938, 2.

45. Both were adaptations: *Peter Ibbetson* from George du Maurier's 1891 novel, and *Outward Bound* from Sutton Vane's 1924 play.

46. In an early story conference he remarked that Jennie exists both in Eben's imagination and in some actual realm. "We must convince the audience that this story may be strange and odd, but it's true. All the other characters may

say, 'Poor Adams, he must be nuts,' but we know it is true" ("*Portrait of Jennie* Conference notes (1/20/47)," David O. Selznick Collection, Harry Ransom Research Center).

47. See Ronald Haver, *David O. Selznick's Hollywood* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 380–86.

48. For more detailed discussion, see the blog entry "They See Dead People" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2016/01/17/they-see-dead-people/.

49. I'd argue that this convention is at work in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* as well, with only the governess, Miles, and Flora able to see Quint and Miss Jessel. James gradually introduces the premise of selective sight of the phantoms.

50. On forking-path plots, see my "Film Futures," in *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 171–88.

51. On *Dangerous Corner*, see my "What-If movies: Forking Paths in the Drawing Room" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2014/11/23/what-if-movies-forking-paths-in-the-drawing-room/.

52. Joseph McBride, *Frank Capra: The Catastrophe of Success* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 510.

53. Edwin Schallert, "Emotional Appeal Capra's Film Goal," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 March 1946, B1.

CHAPTER 10

1. Quoted in Roy Hoopes, *Cain: The Biography of James M. Cain* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 385.

2. Victor Shklovsky, "Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery Story," in *Theory of Prose* (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive, 1990), 101.

3. Warren Phillips, "The Week's Preview," *Collier's*, 22 January 1949, 40; Philip T. Hartung, "So Dear to the Box Office," *Commonweal*, 11 February 1949, 448.

4. Frank Gruber provides an account of his transition from pulp author to screenwriter in "The Mystery Writer Can Make Money," *Publishers Weekly*, 5 April 1941, 1450–54.

5. See Kenneth C. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture: The Paperbacking of America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), and Janice Radaway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 30–31.

6. Carl D. Brandt, "Introduction," in *The House on the Roof*, by Mignon G. Eberhart (1935; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), vi.

7. Lee Wright, "Mysteries Are Books," *Publishers Weekly*, 25 January 1941, 385. For more figures, see James Sandoe, "Dagger of the Mind," in *The Art of the Mystery Story*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 254; Frank Gruber, "Some Notes on Mystery Novels and Their Authors," in *The Notebooks of Raymond Chandler*, ed. Frank Gruber (New York: Ecco Press,

1976), 33–34, and Gruber's memoir, *The Pulp Jungle* (Los Angeles: Sherbourne, 1967), 168–69.

8. Alice Payne Hackett, *Fifty Years of Best Sellers, 1895–1945* (New York: Bowker, 1945), 97.

9. Henry C. Link and Harry Arthur Hopf, *People and Books: A Study of Reading and Book-Buying Habits* (New York: Book Industry Committee, Book Manufacturers' Institute, 1946), 73–74.

10. See Lawrence H. Schwartz, *Creating Faulkner's Reputation: The Politics of Modern Literary Criticism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 71–78.

11. Quoted in Philip K. Scheuer, "A Town Called Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 June 1940, C3.

12. Lucille Fletcher's 1946 radio play "The Thing in the Window" seems to have anticipated this premise.

13. Quoted in Haycraft, *Art of the Mystery Story*, 90.

14. Howard Haycraft, "The Burgeoning Whodunit," *New York Times*, 6 October 1946, BR3-4. Reflections along similar lines can be found in Alfred Bester, "Writing the Radio Mystery," *Writer* 64, no. 12 (December 1951): 392–94.

15. Eric Ambler, "Footnote" (1951), in *Epitaph for a Spy* (1938; New York: Vintage, 2002), 263.

16. Mitchell Wilson, "The Suspense Story," *Writer* 60, no. 1 (January 1947): 15. See Anthony Boucher, "Trojan Horse Opera," in Haycraft, *Art of the Mystery Story*, 249. Ten years later, Boucher was even more explicit about the decline of the whodunit and the rise of hard-boiled detective stories and suspense fiction. See his "What Kind of Mystery Story Appeals to Today's Public?" in *The Mystery Writer's Handbook*, ed. Herbert Brean (New York: Harper, 1956), 3–7.

17. Jacket blurb for Mitchell Wilson's *The Panic-Stricken* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946).

18. "Radio—General Markets," *Writer* 64, no. 1 (January 1951): 58. Neil Verma points out that *Lights Out, Inner Sanctum Mysteries*, and other anthology programs used thriller conventions (*Theater of the Mind: Imagination, Aesthetics, and American Radio Drama* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012], 99–102).

19. Francis Iles, *Before the Fact* (1932; New York: Pocket Books, 1947), 1.

20. "Chaplin in *Circus* a London Sensation," *New York Times*, 16 March 1928, 30.

21. Charles Bennett, who became Hitchcock's prime scenarist, wrote some of these and recalls their place in his career in *Hitchcock's Partner in Suspense: The Life of Screenwriter Charles Bennett*, ed. John Charles Bennett (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 48–49.

22. Other examples include *Ten-Minute Alibi* (1933), *Without Witness* (1934), *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* (1935), *Nine Pine Street* (1933, based on the Lizzie Borden case), *Double Door* (1933, an anticipation of *Rebecca*), *Invitation to a Murder* (1934), *Love from a Stranger* (1936), and the *Rope*-derived *Trunk Crime* (aka *The*

Last Straw, 1937). For a generous overview of these and many others see Amnon Kabatchnik, *Blood on the Stage, 1925–1950: Milestone Plays of Crime, Mystery, and Detection* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2010).

23. Quoted in Sean French, *Patrick Hamilton: A Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 139.

24. For example, *The State v. Elinor Norton*, reviewed in John Chamberlain, "Books of the Times," *New York Times*, 29 January 1934, 13; *Poison Pen*, reviewed in "Richmond Theatre," *Times* (London), 10 August 1937, 8; "Detective Stories: *Death Has a Past*," *Times* (London), 6 June 1939, 19.

25. "Public Getting Chance to Play Detective in Mystery Pic Cycle," *Hollywood Reporter*, 9 November 1944, 7. See also "New Cycle of Thriller Films Descending on Hollywood," *Hollywood Reporter*, 20 June 1944, 9; "Psychological Murder Yarns Getting Big Play at Studios," *Hollywood Reporter*, 28 March 1945, 4; "More Psycho Pix Indicated as Majors Score Successes," *Hollywood Reporter*, 21 December 1945, 13; Fritz Lang, "Here Comes Crime," *Hollywood Reporter*, 31 December 1945, n.p.; "Studios Still Mining Murder Mystery Vein: 54 in Hopper," *Hollywood Reporter*, 10 October 1946, 11.

26. "Horror Pix Win Heavier Adult Patronage at BO: Studios Increase Thriller Budgets," *Hollywood Reporter*, 5 April 1946, 12.

27. "Movie Companies Look to Detective Story Writers for the New Psychological Film," *Publishers Weekly*, 9 March 1946, 1515–16. See also Fred Stanley, "Hollywood Shivers," *New York Times*, 28 May 1944, X3, and Henry Klinger, "The Story That Sells to the Movies," in Brean, *Mystery Writer's Handbook*, 186–92.

28. Richard Mealand suggested that novelists working in the psychological thriller vein gained a wider readership because of the film trend. See "Hollywoodunit," in Haycraft, *Art of the Mystery Story*, 301–3.

29. Raymond Chandler, letter to Hamish Hamilton, 13 October 1950, in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, ed. Dorothy Gardiner and Kathrine Sorley Walker (1962; Plainview, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 60.

30. "New Trend in the Horror Pix," *Variety*, 16 October 1944, 143. See also "Experiment Perilous," *Daily Variety*, 6 December 1944, 7.

31. Anthony Boucher, "As Crime Goes By" (24 February 1946), in *The Anthony Boucher Chronicles: Reviews and Commentary, 1942–1947*, ed. Francis M. Nevins (Lexington, KY: Ramble House, 2001), 102.

32. Quoted in Bill Pronzini, *Gun in Cheek: A Study of "Alternative" Crime Fiction* (New York: Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, 1982), 199.

33. "New Trend in the Horror Pix," 143.

34. "Horror Pix Win Heavier Adult Patronage," 12.

35. A thorough analysis of portraits in films of this period can be found in Steven Jacobs and Lisa Colpaert, *The Dark Galleries: A Museum Guide to Painted Portraits in Film Noir, Gothic Melodramas, and Ghost Stories of the 1940s and 1950s* (Ghent: AraMER, 2013).

36. Patricia Highsmith, "Suspense in Fiction," *Writer* 67, no. 12 (December 1954): 403.

37. Wilson, "Suspense Story," 15–16.

38. Charlotte Armstrong, "Razzle-Dazzle," *Writer* 66, no. 1 (January 1953): 3–4.

39. Hazel Sullivan, "Suspense—False and Genuine," *Writer* 69, no. 12 (December 1951): 397.

40. See Robert W. Dana, "Mr. Hitch (Hitchcock) Is Here," *New York Times*, 19 March 1939, E3, E5; and Alfred Hitchcock, "The Quality of Suspense" (1945), in *Hitchcock on Hitchcock*, vol. 2, *Selected Writings and Interviews* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 36–37. For some sources of this distinction see my blog entries "Hitchcock, Lessing, and the Bomb under the Table" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2013/11/29/hitchcock-lessing-and-the-bomb-under-the-table/ and "Hitchcock Again: 3.9 Steps to S-u-s-p-e-n-s-e" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2013/12/05/hitchcock-again-3-9-steps-to-s-u-s-p-e-n-s-e/.

41. For a detailed analysis of the narrative functions of *Hangover Square*'s score, see Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), chap. 8.

42. Nick Grinde, the aptly named B film and Poverty Row director, mocks those "money-saving train wheels" in "Pictures for Peanuts" (1946), in *Hollywood Directors, 1941–1975*, ed. Richard Koszarski (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 62.

43. Anthony Berkeley Cox, Preface to *The Second Shot* (London: Langail Press, 2010), n.p.

44. Joseph Warren Beach has suggested that James, influenced by the restricted viewpoint of Robert Louis Stevenson's romances and Poe's detective stories, created "psychological mystery stories, almost we might say detective stories" (*The Twentieth-Century Novel* [New York: Century, 1932], 210).

45. See my "Cognition and Comprehension: Viewing and Forgetting in *Mildred Pierce*," in *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 135–50. Further thoughts are in the blog entry "Twice-Told Tales: *Mildred Pierce*" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2013/06/26/twice-told-tales-mildred-pierce/, which links to a video comparison of the two sequences.

46. An extract from the scene is available at http://www.davidbordwell.net/books/reinventing.php.

47. "The Secret Beyond the Door," screenplay by Sylvia Richards, Diana productions, undated, 120–25. Available as a supplement on DVD release, *Le secret derrière la porte*, Wild Side 301 321-2 (2003).

48. *The Blue Gardenia* (1953) does something similar. On this film's multivalent scenes, see Jason Gendler, "The Narration of Beginnings in Classical Cinema" (PhD diss., UCLA, 2014), 355–66.

INTERLUDE: STURGES, OR SHOWING THE PUPPET STRINGS

1. Idwal Jones, "Down Goes McGinty, Up Comes Sturges," *New York Times*, 4 August 1940, 106.

2. Quoted in Alva Johnson, "How to Become a Playwright," *Saturday Evening Post*, 15 March 1941, 88.

3. Brander Matthews, *A Study of the Drama* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1910), 177.

4. Quoted in Brian Henderson, *Four More Screenplays by Preston Sturges* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 759.

5. Matthews, *Study of the Drama*, 138.

6. Quoted in Johnson, "How to Become a Playwright," 83.

7. I discuss Sturges's mockery of the Regent's program in the blog entry "On the More or Less Plausible Sneakiness of One Preston Sturges" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2013/05/27/on-the-more-or-less-plausible-sneakiness-of-one-preston-sturges/.

8. Quoted in James Curtis, *Between Flops: A Biography of Preston Sturges* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982), 163.

9. Henderson reports that an earlier draft of the script had Alfred finding out more quickly, but Sturges built up his doubt and the mystery in order to "gain length" (*Four More Screenplays*, 772).

10. On "prospects," see Henderson, *Four More Screenplays*, 771, 804.

11. Preston Sturges, *Preston Sturges*, ed. Sandy Sturges (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 307.

CHAPTER 11

1. Parker Tyler, *The Hollywood Hallucination* (New York: Creative Age, 1944), 12.

2. Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 92.

3. Welles beat *Hellzapoppin'* to the punch by including the sled among Bigger Thomas's belongings in his March 1941 Broadway production of *Native Son*. See Frank Brady, *Citizen Welles: A Biography of Orson Welles* (New York: Scribner's, 1989), 297.

4. Philip K. Scheuer, "Ovation Accorded Players as Al Jolson Sings Again," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1949, A11. Another reviewer praised the "hallucination" as "a good idea, original, authentic, skillfully and amusingly worked out" (Richard Griffith, "*Jolson Sings Again* Wins Eastern Critics," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 September 1949, 9).

5. Steven Jacobs, "The Dark Galleries," lecture presented at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, 13 March 2014. For fuller treatment of these and other ideas, see Steven Jacobs and Lisa Colpaert, *The Dark Galleries: A Museum Guide to Painted Portraits in Film Noir, Gothic Melodramas, and Ghost Stories of the 1940s and 1950s* (Ghent: AraMER, 2013). See also Marc Vernet, "Le portrait psychopompe," in *Figures de l'absence: De l'invisible au cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1988), 88–111.

6. Quoted in Susan Felleman, *Botticelli in Hollywood: The Films of Albert Lewin* (New York: Twayne, 1997), 37.

7. Quoted in "Albert Lewin," in *The Real Tinsel*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and Harry Silverstein (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 103.

8. Embedded color scenes had previously been used for climactic spectacles like fashion shows and stage performances, or trips to fantasy realms as in *The Wizard of Oz* and *The Blue Bird*. Lewin's brief color inserts are more startling and fasten our attention on artworks. For *Portrait of Jennie*, Selznick seems to have borrowed the transition to full color from *The Moon and Sixpence*.

9. Parker Tyler, *Magic and Myth of the Movies* (New York: Holt, 1947), 65–66.

10. On the toy blocks see James Beuselink, "Albert Lewin's *Dorian Gray*," *Films in Review* 37, no. 2 (February 1986): 106, and Susan Felleman, *Botticelli in Hollywood: The Films of Albert Lewin* (New York: Twayne, 1997), 54–55.

11. On *Wheat and Tares*, see "You Can Go Home Again, and Maybe Find an Old Movie" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2014/03/11/you-can-go-home-again-and-maybe-find-an-old-movie/.

12. An extract from this scene is available at http://www.davidbordwell.net/books/reinventing.php.

13. Less often noted is René Fülöp-Miller's "The Motion Picture in America: A History in the Making," in *The American Theatre*, ed. John Anderson (New York: Dial, 1938), 101–89.

14. Iris Barry's contribution to American film culture is reviewed in Robert Sitton's *Lady in the Dark: Iris Barry and the Art of Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). See especially 245–337. On the institutional and cultural politics of MoMA see Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

15. See David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), chap. 2. See also Ezra Goodman, "Turn Back the Clock: Reminiscences of Edwin S. Porter, or The History of the Motion Picture," *New York Times,* 2 June 1940, 124.

16. For example, screenwriter John Howard Lawson spends fifty-five pages reviewing the history of the American film in his *Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting* (New York: Putnam, 1949), drawing on Bardèche and Brasillach, Jacobs, and other standard sources.

17. Walter Greene, "1889–1939: Pictures [*sic*] 50 Golden Years," *Daily Variety*, 30 October 1939, 6–7, 162–64.

18. See, for example, W. S. Van Dyke II, "From Here to There," *Hollywood Reporter*, 28 October 1939, n.p.

19. See F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Love of the Last Tycoon: The Authorized Text*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (New York: Scribner's, 1993), vi, 101, 119.

20. "Director in East Viewing Early Screen Creations," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 February 1946, B3.

21. Edward Harrison, "Silence Is Still Golden," *New York Times*, 10 July 1938, 124.

22. See Eric Hoyt, *Hollywood Vault: Film Libraries before Home Video* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 95–98.

23. See Hoyt, *Hollywood Vault*, 117–19, and "'Great Films' Slate Drawn for Coronet," *Hollywood Reporter*, 21 March 1949, 9.

24. Aline Mosby, "Little Movie in Hollywood Features Old-Time Silents," *San Mateo Times*, 19 April 1952, 7; Dale D. Drum, "Silent Movies in Los Angeles," *Films in Review* 3 (November 1952): 450–57. For background on the theater, as well as a recounting of its more recent lurid history, see Iain Kennedy's film *Palace of Silents* (2010).

25. On the screenings at the American Contemporary Gallery, see "Pages of Industry History Turned Back to 1895 Days," *Hollywood Reporter*, 6 August 1943, 3; "'Last Laugh' and 'Hamlet' Shown in Films' History," *Hollywood Reporter*, 21 September 1943, 4; "Rudolph Mate Lens Film's Best Work," *Hollywood Reporter*, 1 November 1943, 3. The shows at Horace Mann High School are mentioned in "'Potemkin' Second in Great Pic Series," *Hollywood Reporter*, 14 February 1946, 6, and "Second Series of 'Great Films' Set at Horace Mann School," *Hollywood Reporter*, 23 September 1946, 19.

26. The Masonic Temple screenings are mentioned in an advertisement, *Screen Writer* 3, no. 6 (November 1947): 38, and "News and Notes," *Screen Writer* 3, no. 3 (August 1947): 47.

27. An earlier example was Warners' 1931 "Movie Album" short subject, which reviewed movie history from Biograph to the end of the silent days.

28. "Griffith Exhibition Preview at Museum's Film Library," *Film Daily*, 13 November 1940, 9. The Biographs in the program were *A Corner in Wheat* (1909), *The Unchanging Sea* (1910), *The Lonedale Operator* (1911), and *Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912). On Barry's restorations of Griffith, see the 1945 polemic by Herb Sterne, "Iris Barry: The Attila of Films," in *The Best of "Rob Wagner's Script,"* ed. Anthony Slide (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1985), 140–44.

29. "Homage Paid D. W. Griffith in First Festival Program," *Hollywood Reporter*, 17 January 1944, 8. The seven programs included the rarely seen original three-hour version of *The Birth of a Nation* ("D. W.'s Masterpiece Wears Years Well," *Hollywood Reporter*, 24 January 1944, 3).

30. An exception is William Castle's *Hollywood Story* (1951). A contemporary producer takes over a shuttered studio in order to produce a film based on the 1929 murder of a major director. The film, based loosely on the killing of William Desmond Taylor, boasts cameo appearances from some silent stars, and in a brief pastiche it offers a respectful tribute to silent melodrama.

31. William Saroyan, "The Year of Heaven," *New Republic*, 4 January 1939, 255–56.

32. Ezra Goodman, "Flicker Flashbacks," *Variety*, 5 January 1945, 24. Some "Flicker Flashbacks" were included in the rather peculiar feature *Make Mine Laughs* (1949).

33. Lloyd Bacon, "The Oldtime 2-Reel Comedy as a Talent Proving Ground," *Variety*, 4 January 1950, 9.

34. "Museum to Show Old Film Comedies," *New York Times*, 22 July 1940; Bosley Crowther, "Cavalcade of Movie Comics," *New York Times*, 20 October

1940, 117. See also Douglas W. Churchill, "Ecole de Custard Pie," *New York Times*, 6 March 1938, 153.

35. "Comedy's Greatest Era," in James Agee, *Film Writing and Selected Journalism*, ed. Michael Sragow (New York: Library of America, 2005), 9-33.

36. Bacon, "Oldtime 2-Reel Comedy," 9.

37. Another candidate is *The Villain Still Pursued Her* (1940), which is at once a spoof of stage melodrama and a mockery of silent-film conventions, laced with some slapstick. Its title seems to cite both a 1906 Vitagraph film called *And the Villain Still Pursued Her* and a 1912 vaudeville skit by Arthur Denvir called *The Villain Still Pursued Her*. All three have very different plots. The plot of the 1940 film derives from an 1844 melodrama by William H. Smith, *The Drunkard*, which was frequently travestied. A semiserious production of the play ran in Los Angeles through the 1930s and 1940s, with beer and pretzels provided to the audience. The filmmakers seem to have simply taken the *Villain* title as a catch-all label for corny melodrama. What seems significant is that the 1940 reboot appeared during the broader tendency to revisit the silent era.

38. "Return of the Lowbrow," *New York Times*, 8 October 1939, 138.

39. Kevin Hagopian, "*The Romance of Celluloid*: On-screen Public Relations Discourse in the Self-Construction of Hollywood's Golden Age, 1938–1941," paper delivered at the 2014 Film and History Conference, Madison, Wisconsin, 1 November 2014.

40. See "Show Biz Nostalgia Pays Off," *Variety*, 23 July 1947, 1, 18.

41. Luke Holmaas points this out in his unpublished paper, "Small-Town Snowslides: Dimensions of Narrative in *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* and *Hail the Conquering Hero*" (2013), 20.

42. Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939), 412.

43. Frank Brady, *Citizen Welles: A Biography of Orson Welles* (New York: Scribner's, 1989), 146–47.

44. Audiocassette number 4 accompanying *This Is Orson Welles* (1992), side A, 18:37.

45. Patrick McGilligan, *Young Orson: The Years of Luck and Genius on the Path to "Citizen Kane"* (New York: Harper, 2015), 566, 577, 589–90. Welles usually cited *Stagecoach* (1939) as the most influential film he saw. See Orson Welles and Peter Bogdanovich, *This Is Orson Welles* (New York: Da Capo, 1998), 28–29.

46. Harlan Lebo supplies background on the making of the *News on the March* segment in "*Citizen Kane": A Filmmaker's Journey* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016), 163–65.

47. "The Magnificent Ambersons," unpublished screenplay by Orson Welles, 15 August 1941, 97, Agnes Moorhead Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society. In the cutting continuity, the scene on the porch develops to show superimposed visions of Lucy wooed by her suitors; these too seem to evoke silent-cinema imagery. See Robert L. Carringer, "*The Magnificent Ambersons": A Reconstruction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 172.

48. For examples of this early cinema practice, see "*The Magnificent Ambersons*: A Usable Past" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2014/05/30/the-magnificent-ambersons-a-usable-past/. Sacha Guitry's *Roman d'un tricheur* (1936) opens with an updated introduction to the players, this time in a film studio.

49. The Holt and Méliès posters are mentioned in the cutting continuity in Carringer's "*The Magnificent Ambersons,*" 214. Others are not, but we can clearly discern some titles: *The Bugler of Battery B* (1912), *Her Husband's Wife* (1912), *Ten Days with a Fleet of U.S. Battleships* (1912), and *The Mis-Sent Letter* (1912). The poster announcing *Jesse James* may refer to a two-reeler of that title that circulated in 1911–12, but James was the subject of many films of the period. There is also an advertisement for *The Cow-Boy Girl*, a short stage drama that could have played the Bijou in 1912. The Jack Holt picture advertised, *Explosion*, is fictitious, like Sturges's posters for *Chaos over Taos* and *Maggie of the Marines* in *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*. For discussion of this Bijou scene, see http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2014/05/30/the-magnificent-ambersons-a-usable-past/ and http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2014/08/20/the-ambersons-poster-mystery-the-clincher/.

INTERLUDE: HITCHCOCK AND WELLES

1. Patrick McGilligan, *Alfred Hitchcock: A Life in Darkness and Light* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 653.

2. Kenneth Tynan, *Curtains: Selections from the Drama Criticism and Related Writings* (New York: Atheneum, 1961), 255.

3. Kenneth Tynan, "*Playboy* Interview: Orson Welles," in *Orson Welles: Interviews*, ed. Mark W. Estrin (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2002), 135.

4. "New Films in London," *Times* (London), 25 May 1936, 12.

5. His early strategies for maintaining his distinctive profile are detailed in Janet Staiger, "Creating the Brand: The Hitchcock Touch," in *The Cambridge Companion to Alfred Hitchcock*, ed. Jonathan Freedman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 40–50. See also Robert E. Kapsis, *Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), chap. 2.

6. Hitchcock frequently claimed he objected to the demands that he exonerate the husband. His preferred ending would have shown him unwittingly mailing his wife's accusatory letter after he has done away with her. But the very early versions of the script that Hitchcock prepared with Alma Reville planned "to have her husband be villainous in her imagination only." See John Russell Taylor, *Hitch: The Life and Times of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 176.

7. "*Suspicion* Can Be Smash Hit with Change in the Ending," *Hollywood Reporter*, 18 September 1941, 3; see also "*Suspicion*," *Variety*, 24 September 1941, 8.

8. The drama's author, writer and actor Frank Vosper, plays the sniper in Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1935). Vosper's source is an Agatha Christie short story "Philomel Cottage." The play does include a rival suitor, al-

though he isn't much help to the heroine. Interestingly, Christie's story turns on the revelation that the husband isn't the only practitioner of hearthside murder.

9. Diane Waldman, "Horror and Domesticity: The Modern Gothic Romance Film of the 1940s" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin—Madison, 1981), 5–56.

10. McGilligan, *Alfred Hitchcock*, 310.

11. "*Ladies in Retirement*," *Variety*, 20 March 1940, 50.

12. "*Crossroads*," *Variety*, 24 June 1942, 8.

13. *New York Herald Tribune* review quoted in advertisement for *The Fallen Sparrow*, *Variety*, 19 October 1943, 5.

14. Quoted in Philip K. Scheuer, "Film History Made by *Double Indemnity*," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 August 1944, C1.

15. Philip K. Scheuer, "Trio Gives Horror Picture New Dress," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 March 1943, C3, and Radie Harris, "Hollywood Runaround," *Variety*, 11 September 1945, 4. The Disney film Harris mentions is *Make Mine Music*, in which the Johnny Fedora episode is said to contain suspense "as breathless as a Hitchcock thriller."

16. William Fifield, "To the Golden Corn," *Writer* 62, no. 8 (August 1949): 259.

17. Sydney Gottlieb surveys Hitchcock's branding strategies, some quite amusing, in "Step Seventeen: Brand Hitchcock," in *39 Steps to the Genius of Hitchcock: A BFI Compendium* (London: British Film Institute, 2012), 72–77.

18. Alfred Hitchcock, "Let 'em Play God," *Hollywood Reporter* 100, no. 47 (11 October 1948), n.p., reprinted in *Hitchcock on Hitchcock*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 113. In a series of blog entries, starting with "Hitchcock, Lessing, and the Bomb under the Table," I survey some sources of the suspense/surprise dichotomy. See http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2013/11/29/hitchcock-lessing-and-the-bomb-under-the-table/.

19. Hitchcock, "Introduction: The Quality of Suspense," in *Alfred Hitchcock's Fireside Book of Suspense* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947), viii.

20. Hitchcock, "Let 'em Play God," 114.

21. Selwyn Jepson's original novel *Outrun the Constable* (New York: Doubleday, 1948) plays with viewpoint as well. All the chapters but one are presented in first-person narration recounted by Eve, but the second chapter violates that. It presents the crime in a third-person account that deceives us about who the murderer is.

22. On the "chamber drama" aspect of the film, see the blog entry "*Dial M for Murder*: Hitchcock Frets Not at His Narrow Room" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2012/09/07/dial-m-for-murder-hitchcock-frets-not-at-his-narrow-room/.

23. Quoted in McGilligan, *Alfred Hitchcock*, 469.

24. For a detailed account of the project see Joseph McBride, "An Old Master's Unheard Cri de Coeur: Alfred Hitchcock's *Mary Rose*," *Cineaste* 26, no. 2 (March 2000): 24–28.

25. "Encounter with Alfred Hitchcock: Interview with Charles Bitsch and François Truffaut" (1956), in *Hitchcock on Hitchcock*, vol. 2, *Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 83.

26. Quoted in Bill Krohn, *Hitchcock at Work* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 264.

27. Quoted in Gerald Pratley et al., "Hitch: I Wish I Didn't Have to Shoot the Picture" (1966), in Gottlieb, *Hitchcock on Hitchcock,* 2:203.

28. Krohn, *Hitchcock at Work*, 114. In her essay "Suspense in Fiction" (*Writer 67*, no. 12 [December 1954]: 404), Patricia Highsmith claims that the book's second, coerced murder by Guy was the center of suspense for her, and she saw that omitting it weakened the film.

29. See Robert W. Dana, "Mr. Hitch (Hitchcock) Is Here," *New York Times*, 19 March 1939, E3, E5.

30. Details of the decision to break with Scottie's viewpoint are explained in McGilligan, *Alfred Hitchcock*, 547–48, 563–64.

31. I discuss some of these conventions in "Deadlier Than the Male (Novelist)" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2015/11/12/deadlier-than-the-male-novelist/.

32. Rui Nogueira and Nicoletta Zalaffi, "Hitch, Hitch, Hitch, Hurrah!" (1972), in *Alfred Hitchcock Interviews*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 123.

33. Tony Lee Moral, *Hitchcock and the Making of "Marnie"* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2003), 87.

34. Mordecai Gorelik, *New Theatres for Old* (New York: Samuel French, 1940), 281–83.

35. Quoted in Simon Callow, *Orson Welles: The Road to Xanadu* (New York: Viking, 1996), 342. See also Welles's review of Gorelik's book, "The Self-Conscious Theatre," *Saturday Review*, 8 February 1941, 12. Thanks to Sid Gottlieb for this reference.

36. Orson Welles, "Radio Drama: Progress of Drama in Broadcasting," in *The 1940 Radio Annual*, ed. Jack Alicoate (New York: Radio Daily, 1940), 55.

37. "*Lady from Shanghai* Puts Effects before Story Line," *Hollywood Reporter*, 9 April 1948, 3. George Couloris observed that Welles was "a genius who has flashes of imagination that galvanize a show, but sometimes the intervals are not galvanic at all" (Patrick McGilligan, *Young Orson: The Years of Luck and Genius on the Path to Citizen Kane* [New York: Harper, 2015], 421). Critic Eric Bentley, a foe of Theatricalism, complained that Welles focused on overwhelming moments because he couldn't tell a coherent story. See Bentley, "*Othello* on Film and on the Stage," *New Republic*, 3 October 1955, 21. Kenneth Tynan mounted a defense of Wellesian shock effects in *He That Plays the King: A View of the Theatre* (London: Longmans, Green, 1950), 55–56. Welles wrote an introduction to the volume.

38. For example, "'Around World (in 80 Days) Tasty Wellesapoppin Dish," *Daily Variety*, 3 June 1946, 1.

39. Barbara Leaming, *Orson Welles: A Biography* (New York: Viking, 1985), 338.

40. Different versions of *Macbeth, Othello*, and *Mr. Arkadin* were premiered or released. Welles did not complete any of the versions of *Arkadin* himself; for an overview, see Jonathan Rosenbaum, "The Seven *Arkadin*s," in his *Discovering Orson Welles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 146–62.

41. See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), chap. 27.

42. Simon Callow, *Orson Welles*, vol. 3, *One Man Band* (New York: Viking, 2015), 395.

43. Quoted in Jean-Pierre Berthomé and François Thomas, *Orson Welles at Work* (New York: Phaidon, 2008), 283.

44. An admirably detailed argument along these lines is François Thomas, "Orson Welles' Turn from Live Recording to Postsynchronization: A Technical and Aesthetic Evolution," in *Cinesonic: Cinema and the Sound of Music* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2000), 173–89.

45. "The Stranger, Shooting Script, 1946," screenplay by Anthony Veiller, adapted by Victor Trivas and Decla Dunning. Available at http://www.wellesnet.com/orson-welles-scripts-online/.

46. Joseph Warren Beach, *The Method of Henry James* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1918), 47.

47. For a fuller discussion of the past-tense orientation of the film, see "*The Magnificent Ambersons*: A Usable Past" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2014/05/30/the-magnificent-ambersons-a-usable-past/.

CONCLUSION

1. Richard Brooks, *The Producer* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), 304.

2. The film was shown in the United States as *Portrait of a Woman*. See Bosley Crowther, "The Screen in Review," *New York Times*, 22 April 1946, 32; "Feyder Turns out Another Gallic Hit," *Hollywood Reporter*, 4 September 1946, 3.

3. Thanks to Hiroshi Kitamura for information about American films circulating in Japan in the late 1940s.

4. According to the film's codirector David Lean, he encouraged Noël Coward to imitate *Kane*. See Kevin Brownlow, *David Lean: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996), 154.

5. Brian Petersen, *Johan Jacobsen: Mod strommen I dansk film- or produktionskultur, 1938–66* (PhD diss., University of Copenhagen, 2015), 106. I'm grateful to Casper Tybjerg for the reference.

6. Heidi Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany: Reconstructing National Identity after Hitler* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 54–55, 174–75, 261–64.

7. See Rudolf Thome, "Thoughts about Filmmaking in the FRG (1980),"

in *West German Filmmakers: Visions and Voices*, ed. Eric Rentschler (New York: Holmes and Meir, 1988), 213–14.

8. See "Michael Curtiz—Anarchist in Hollywood?" in Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *The Anarchy of the Imagination*, ed. Michael Töteberg and Leo A. Lensing (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 104–5; Eric Rentschler, commentary for *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (Criterion DVD no. 204, 2003), 10:40–14:58.

9. Alexandre Astruc, "L'évolution du cinéma américain," in *Du stylo à la caméra—et de la caméra au stylo: Écrits, 1942–1984* (Paris: L'Archipel, 1992), 292; André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," in Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 30.

10. Claude-Edmonde Magny, *The Age of the American Novel: The Film Aesthetic of Fiction between the Two Wars*, trans. Stanley Hochman (New York: Ungar, 1972).

11. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Quand Hollywood veut faire penser: *Citizen Kane*, film d'Orson Welles," *L'Écran Français*, 1 August 1945, 3–5, 15, 40.

12. Éric Rohmer, "Rediscovering America" (1955), in *Cahiers du Cinéma, the 1950s: Neo-realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 89.

13. Ibid., 92. For a somewhat contrary view see Claude Chabrol, "Evolution of the Thriller" (1955), in ibid., 158-63.

14. See Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 216–23.

15. I discuss some of Truffaut's thriller strategies in "Truffaut/Hitchcock, Hitchcock/Truffaut, and the Big Reveal" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2015/06/12/truffauthitchcock-hitchcocktruffaut-and-the-big-reveal/.

16. Richard Brody, *Everything Is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Metropolitan, 2008), 96.

17. François Truffaut, "Les espadrilles de William Irish," in *Le plaisir des yeux* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1987), 133–37.

18. Marcel Duhamel, quoted in Thomas Narcejac, *La fin d'un bluff: Essai sur le roman policier noir américain* (Paris: Portulan, 1949), 52. For background on this and other publishing series, see Étienne Borgers, "Série noire," in *The Big Book of Noir*, ed. Ed Gorman, Lee Server, and Martin H. Greenberg (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1998), 237–44.

19. "H'wood's 'Offbeat' Prod. Trend," *Variety*, 5 March 1952, 3.

20. The most comprehensive account of this trend is Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York: New York University Press, 2015). In keeping with the media's use of "well-made" middlebrow modernism, the two television versions of *The Slap* are derived from a novel of the same title.

21. I make this argument in more detail in *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 82.

22. See "The 1940s are over, and Tarantino's Still Playing with Blocks" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2014/06/11/the-1940s-are-over-and-tarantinos-still-playing-with-blocks/.

23. See "*Indignation*: Novel into Film, Novelistic Film," at http:// http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2016/08/07/indignation-novel-into-film-novelistic-film/. For other recent examples, see "Dead Man Talking" at http://http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2015/08/24/dead-man-talking/.

24. The vast catalog of narrative options in Linda Aronson's manual *The 21st Century Screenplay: A Comprehensive Guide to Writing Tomorrow's Films* (Los Angeles: Silman James, 2011) suggests that reworking and cross-breeding 1940s schemas constitute the lingua franca of today's mainstream moviemaking. I offer examples from several films in "Fantasy, Flashbacks, and What-Ifs: 2016 Pays Off the Past," at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2017/01/02/fantasy-flashbacks-and-what-ifs-2016-pays-off-the-past/.

25. John Houseman, *Front and Center* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 376–77.

26. I discuss some of these conventions in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), chap. 10.

27. An analysis of this hypothetical, external yet subjective voice-over is in Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 213-28.

28. For a discussion, see David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Christopher Nolan: A Labyrinth of Linkages* (Madison, WI: Irvington Way Institute Press, 2013), chap. 3. Available at http://www.davidbordwell.net/books/nolan.php.

29. Paul Ramaeker discusses the modern fantasy romance in detail in his essay series beginning with "Mad Love: The Surrealism of the Supernatural Romantic Melodrama" at https://3rdmeaning.wordpress.com/2012/07/05/mad-love-the-surrealism-of-the-supernatural-romantic-melodrama-part-one/.

30. I discuss the narrative manipulations of *Memento* in *The Way Hollywood Tells It,* 78–81, and of *The Prestige* in "Functions of Film Sound: *The Prestige*" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/filmart/prestige.php.

31. For an analysis of the film's debt to 1940s thrillers, see "Gone Grrrl" at http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2014/10/21/gone-grrrl/.

32. Garson Kanin, "Letter to a Bewildered Young Man," *Hollywood Reporter*, 31 December 1940, n.p.

33. See, for example, Benjamin Svetzky and Andy Lewis, "Hollywood's 100 Favorite Movie Lines," *Hollywood Reporter*, 18 March 2016, 68–76. Of the top ten listed, five are from 1939–50, and of the top hundred, twenty are. Only 1970s titles (eleven) approach this total.

INDEX

Page numbers in italics refer to illustrations. Film titles are followed by date only. Works other than films are identified by date and type of work.

Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, committees for standards and best practices, 31
Accused, The (1949), 216, 390
Ace in the Hole (1953), 511n22
Across the Pacific (1942), 425
Action in the North Atlantic (1943), 247
Act of Violence (1951), 215
actors: character actors, 216; under contract to Majors in 1940, 29; under contract to Majors in 1950, 489n46; pace of work, 30; seven-year option contract, 30. *See also* stars, of 1940s
Actors and Sin (1951), 427
Adam's Rib (1949), 175
adaptations: in Five Fat Years, 22, 228–29; of middlebrow modernist literary works to film, 261–72, 471
Adventures of a Ten-Mark Note (1928), 177
Affairs of a Gentleman (1934), 75
Affairs of Susan, The (1945), 113–17, 185; breadcrumb trail, 115; flashbacks concentrating on one character after another, 203; flashbacks showing social masks, 114–15, 123; function of flashbacks, 115–16
afterlife drama, 26–27; special rules for, 365–70
Agee, James, 342; "Comedy's Greatest Era," 433; on films as indication of national character, 4–5, 218; on *The Human Comedy*, 143; *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), 351
agitprop stage dramas, and social problems, 351. *See also* Living Newspaper productions
Air Force (1943), 151
Albright, Ivan, 422
Alias Nick Beale (1949), 91
All about Eve (1950), 183, 190–98, 199; Academy Award, 463; changes in characters, 193; epilogue, 197; flashbacks, 69, 78; and Fox's "scheduled program"

All about Eve (1950) (*continued*)
policy, 499n54; issue of protagonist, 191; monologues, 192; narrator's direct address, 192, 197; perspective of each character's range of knowledge, 195; shift from one restricted episode to another, 203
Allegro (1948 play, Rodgers and Hammerstein), 54, 261, 368
Allen, Fred, 425
All My Sons (1948), 218
All the King's Men (1950), 33, 70, 458, 472
All This and Heaven Too (1940), 52, 291
All through the Night (1941), 95
Almodóvar, Pedro, 475
Altman, Robert, 170
Always (1989), 473
Ambler, Eric, 378, 379, 382
Ameche, Don, 21, 433
American Graffiti (1974), 473
American Romance, An (1944), 368
American Society of Cinematographers, 31
amnesia: as common narrative device in film and world literature, 5–7, 485nn13–14; in 1940s films, 5–7, 40, 53, 99–100, 183, 209, 296, 311, 315–16, 324, 333–35, 365, 370, 390, 397, 454
Anchors Aweigh (1945), 292, *419*
Anderson, Maxwell: avant-garde experiment, 49; *The Star-Wagon* (1937 play), 359, 369
Anderson, Paul Thomas, 3, 511n19
Anderson, Wes, 276, 511n19
Andrews, Dana, 142, 151, 217, 221
And Then There Were None (1944), 206, 211
Andy Hardy series, 139–40
Angels over Broadway (1940), 171, 202, 287
Anger, Kenneth, 276
Annie Get Your Gun, 22, 510n17
Applause (1929), 515n7
approach/retreat in opening and closing, 44, 63–64
Armstrong, Charlotte, 378, 382, 445, 468
Arnold, Edward, 168
Arrowsmith (1931), 135
Arsenic and Old Lace (1944), 14, 386, 418, 447
artifice. *See* self-conscious artifice (reflexivity)
Asian theater, 59
Asphalt Jungle, The (1950), 145–46, 217
Astaire, Fred, "Bojangles of Harlem" number, 11
Astruc, Alexandre, 467
auditory flashbacks, 77, 233, 290–92
Awful Truth, The (1937), 114, 115

Backfire (1950), 93
Backlash (1947), 92
Back to Bataan (1945), 79
Bacon, Lloyd, 432, 433
Bad and the Beautiful, The (1953), 471
Ballinger, Bill S., *Portrait in Smoke* (1950 novel), 397
Ball of Fire (1942), 11
Bambi (1942), 18, 180
Bamboo Blonde, The (1946), 91
Bardèche, Maurice, 429
Bardin, John Franklin, 378, 397–98; *Devil Take the Blue-Tail Fly* (1948 novel), 318
Barefoot Contessa, The (1954), 198
Barrie, J. M., *Mary Rose* (1924 play), 447, 450
Barry, Iris, 430
Barrymore, Ethel, 32
Battleground (1949), 151–52
Baum, Vicki, 168, 504n5; *Grand Hotel* (1929 novel), 164, 165, 166; *Hotel Berlin '43* (1944 novel), 165, 168; *Hotel Shanghai '37* (1939 novel), 165
Baxter, Anne, 192, 217
Bazin, André, 10, 12–13, 170, 171, 467
Beach, Joseph Warren, 504n4, 525n44
Beast with Five Fingers, The (1947), 383
Beau Geste (1927), 73, 311
Beau Geste (1939), 73, 79
Bedlam (1946), 383

Beery, Wallace, 168
Beetlejuice (1989), 473
Behind Green Lights (1946), 81, 172
behind-the-scenes story, 9, 426–28
Bellamy, Ralph, 32, 34
Bellamy Trial (1929), 498n44
Benchley, Robert, 169, 178–80
Benedek, László, 264, 512n12
Ben-Hur (1925), 432
Ben-Hur (2016), 470
Bennett, Arnold, *Imperial Palace* (1930 novel), 165
Bennett, Charles, 39–40, 381, 523n21; *Blackmail* (1928 play), 380
Benny, Jack, 21
Bentley, Eric, 54, 532n37
Bergen, Edgar, 181
Berlin, Irving, 22, 32
Bernhardt, Curtis, 28, 310, 320, 402, 512n12
Bertolucci, Bernardo, 472
Best Years of Our Lives, The (1946), 12, 16, 124, 172; multiple-protagonist schema, 137–39, 204, 352; parallels, 137–38; and reliable characterization, 214
Between Two Worlds (1944), 361
Bewitched (1945), 117, 314–15, 319, 383
Beyond Glory (1948), crisis situation with flashbacks, 97–101, 102, 218–19, 463
Beyond Victory (1931), 73, 124
B films: horror films in 1940s, 358; limited during war years due to rationing of raw film stock, 21; postwar revival of, 23
biblical spectacle, 11, 471
Big Clock, The (1948), 69, 83, 383
Big Five studios (MGM, Paramount, 20th Century-Fox, Warner Bros., RKO): cooperation among, 19, 30; ownership of and divestment of theater chains, 19, 21, 23
Big Lebowski, The (1998), 460
Big Parade, The (1925), 432
Big Short, The (2015), 474
Big Shot, The (1940), 81
Big Sleep, The (1945), 93, 202, 215
biographical films, 75, 368, 374
Birth of a Nation, The (1915), 77, 201, 431, 432
Bishop's Wife, The (1947), 342, 365–66
Black Angel (1946), 77, 293, 469, 475
Blackmail (1929), 381, 442
Blind Alley (1939), 58, 299, 308–9; recurring dream, 303–4, 310; remake of in social problem mode, 325; template for clinical psychological films of 1940s, 303
Blind Spot (1947), 403
Blithe Spirit (1945), 26
Bloch, Robert, 450
block construction, 469, 470; blocks connected by recurring object, 176–78; built around seasons, 462; chapter divisions, 175; in contemporary films, 475; flashbacks, 175; independent plotlines, 175–76; more common in 1940s than in 1930s films, 174–75; in mystery writing, 174; in omnibus film (freestanding stories illustrating larger theme), 178–80; parallel lines of action, 176; shift from one restricted episode to another, 203; soft section breaks (dates or montage sequences), 175
Bluebeard (1944), 310, 392
Blue Bird, The (1940), 358, 472
Blue Gardenia (1953), 525n48
Blues in the Night (1941), 295, 470
Body and Soul (1947), 89, 157–58
Body Disappears, The (1941), 358
Bogart, Humphrey, 202, 217, 284, 402; in *Passage to Marseille*, 95
Bombardier (1943), 428
Boomerang! (1947), 342, 346, 349–50, 520n25
Border Incident (1949), 347
Boucher, Anthony, 523n16
Bourne Ultimatum, The (2007), 475
Boutell, Anita, *Death Has a Past* (1939 novel), 174
Bowman, Peter, *Beach Red* (1945 novel), 146

Boyer, Charles, 34–35, 178, 217, 293, 402
Boy Meets Girl (1938), 426
Bracken, Eddie, 427
Brackett, Charles, 32, 33, 34, 162
Brahm, John, 390, 402
Brasillach, Robert, 429
breadcrumb trail, and flashbacks, 16, 87–88, 101, 104, 115, 120, 157
Breakfast in Hollywood (1946), 167–68
Breathless (1960), 468
Brecht, Bertolt, 59, 64
Breen Office. *See* Motion Picture Production Code
Brent, George, 116, 217
Bride Wore Black, The (1968), 468
Bridge of San Luis Rey, The (1944), 167
Brigadoon (Rodgers and Hammerstein 1947 play), 357
Brighton Strangler, The (1945), 389–90
British films: in Hollywood tradition, 466; imported during WWII and after, 26–27; in thriller tradition, 466
Bromfield, Lewis, 48; *Mrs. Parkington* (1943 novel), 72; *Twenty-Four Hours* (1932 novel), 174
Brooks, Richard, *The Producer* (1951 novel), 435, 462, 478, 519n4
Brown, Clarence, 142, 143
Brute Force (1947), 85, 146, 355
Buchan, John, 380
Bullett, Gerald, *The Jury* (1935 novel), 50
Burnett, W. R.: *The Asphalt Jungle* (1949 novel), 145; *Goodbye to the Past* (1934 novel), 493n105; *Little Caesar* (1929 novel), 493n105
Busses Roar (1942), 167

Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1920), 414, 431
Cabin in the Sky (1943), 178, 301
Caesar, Sid, 337, 339
Cage, John, 16
Caged (1950), 26, 355–56, 357
Cagney, James, 216
Cahiers du Cinéma, "Young Turks" of, 467–68
Cain, James M., 54, 86–87, 372, 374, 391, 466
Calling Dr. Death (1943), 6, *251*, 278
Call Northside 777 (1948), 344, 347, *350*, 374, 447
Callow, Simon, 456
Cameraman, The (1928), 343
Canary Murder Case, The (1929), 413
Cañon City (1948), 346, 350
Capote, Truman, 54
Capra, Frank, 20, 28, 370
Captain Blood, 372
Captain Hates the Sea (1934), 166
Carousel (Rodgers and Hammerstein 1945 play), 357
Carr, John Dickson, 376–77
Carrière, Jean-Claude, 13, 45, 153, 325, 464, 465
Carson, Jack, 427
Car Wash (1976), 472
Casablanca (1943), 2, 28, 69, 95, 215
Caspary, Vera, 374, 382; adaptation of Klempner's *A Letter to Five Wives*, 184–85, 188, 190, 192, 471; *Laura* (1942 novel), 174, 184, 256; and *Les Girls* (1957), 471; *Stranger Than Truth* (1946 novel), 184, 195
Castle, William, *Hollywood Story* (1951), 528n30
"category publishing," 375
Cat People, The (1943), 208, 310, 366, 368
Cause for Alarm! (1951), 172
censorship: and conventions for creative expression, 43; relaxation of, 26, 217, 357. *See also* Motion Picture Production Code
Chabrol, Claude, 468
Champion (1949), 156–57, 158, 160–61, 215
Chan, Charlie, 372
Chandler, Raymond, 215, 374, 378; on Elisabeth Sanxay Holding, 382; *The Lady in the Lake* (1943 novel), 282
Chaplin, Charlie, 386, 394–96, *395*, 402, 426, 432–33
character actors, 216

characterization: antihero, 216; characters of mixed morality, 215; complexity in accord with narrative treatment, 216, 218; in conversion narrative, 95, 215–16; development of, and inner monologue, 288–89; enhancement of, and flashbacks, 84–85, 102; Good-Bad Girl, 215; Good-Bad Man of silent Westerns, 215; and manipulation of narrative information, 214–19; models of, 216; and moving-spotlight narration, 219–20, 289; in psychoanalytical films, 216; reliance on first impressions, 214–15; and star images, 217–18; stock characters, 216; and suppressed information, 214–18; and sympathy for the villain, 217, 386–91
Chase, Mary, *Harvey* (1944 play), 357
Chase, The (1946), 331–35, *332*, 383, 465, 477, 496n13; amnesia schema, 333–*34*; revision of "and then I woke up" dream schema, 332–33; unmarked ellipsis, 400
Cheers for Miss Bishop (1941), 83, 240, 458
Chevalier, Maurice, 250
chiaroscuro compositions, 58, 350, 420
Chicago (1928), 69
Child Is Born, A (1940), 167
Chimes at Midnight (1965), 455, 456, 457–58
Chodorov, Edward, *Kind Lady* (1935 play), 380, 381
Christie, Agatha: and "leaving things out," 206, 227, 231; "Philomel Cottage" (short story), 530n8; *And Then There Were None* (1939 novel and 1943 play), 206
Christmas Carol, A (1938), 365
Christmas in July (1940), 405, 409, 411
circulating-object schema, 464
Citizen Kane (1941), 2, 3, 26, 57, 106; criticism of flashbacks in, 70; deep-focus imagery, 60; half-hidden motifs, 27; Herman Mankiewicz as co-screenwriter, 34; hint of mother fixation, 310; hooks, 211–12; innovation of biographical film genre, 75; multiple flashback construction, 74–76, 175, 203, 370, 457; multiple-narrator layout, 240; mystery of "rosebud," 373; "News on the March" reel in, 437–38; Oscar contender in 1941, 69; "prismatic" flashbacks, 75, 112–13, 218; snow globe, 52, 500n2; sound cuts and surprise transitions, 453; time shifts and varying perspectives to explore personality changes, 101; voted as best film of all time until *Vertigo*, 27
City for Conquest (1940), 249
City Streets (1931), 77
City That Never Sleeps (1953), 241
Clair, René, 27, 47, 206, 410
Clay Pigeon (1949), *293*, 475
Client, The (1994), 451
Club Havana (1945), 166–67, 171, 202
Cobweb, The (1955), 325
Cockeyed Miracle, The (1946), 365
Cocteau, Jean, adaptation of play *Les parents terribles* to film, 170–71
Coen, Joel and Ethan, 3
Cohn, Art, 159
Cohn, Harry, 32, 70
Collins, Ray, 511n24
Collins, Wilkie: "casebook" genre, 174; *The Moonstone* (1868 novel), 6; shifting viewpoints in works, 47
Colman, Ronald, 293
Columbia, 19, 21; "Screen Snapshots" (1944), 431
combat films, 162, 342, 503n21; common-goal plot, 146–52; and inserted newsreel footage, 428; leading-edge protagonist, 147; memories and imaginings, 294; opening credits identifying players through pictures

combat films (*continued*)
and character names, 147–48; personal goals in protagonist as team plot, 148; protagonist as team, 147–52, 263; and romantic triangle, 147; single protagonist against establishment, 147; voice-over in common-goal films, 147, 150–51; women in war situations, 149–50
combat literature, fragmented story action, 146
common-goal plot: combat films, 146–52; heist or caper film, 145–46
Conan Doyle, Arthur, "dying message" convention, 75, 497n33
Confessions of a Nazi Spy (1939), 346
Confidence (2003), 474
Confidence Girl (1950), 79, 241
Confidential Agent, The (1945), 382, 444
Confidentially Yours (*Vivement dimanche!*, 1983), 468
Conflict (1945), 383
Conrad, Joseph, 47, 48, 459; *Secret Agent* (1907 novel), 381
Contagion (2011), 470
converging-fates plot (Grand Hotel template), 58, 146, 162, 163–69
conversion narrative, 95, 215–16
Cooper, Gary, 30, 32, 150
Cooper, Jackie, 424–25
cooperative competition, among Hollywood studios, 16; gambling, 32; informal social networks, 32; in-jokes, 34–35; loanout of prints for home screening rooms, 32–33; loanouts, 30; sale of stories and scripts among studios, 31; within studio cooperation, 31–32
Coroner Creek (1948), 373
Corwin, Norman, 50, 239; "Untitled" (1944 radio drama), 252
Costello, Lou, 305
costume dramas, 11
Cotten, Joseph, 217
Couloris, George, 532n37
Counter-Attack (1945), 172, 206–7
Cover Girl (1944), 130–34, 152, *274*; fairy tale and musical motifs, 131–32; omniscient narration, 201; parallelism, 132; and reliable characterization, 214; subjective narration, 274
Coward, Noël, 26, 466, 533n4
Cox, Anthony Berkeley, 397; *Before the Fact* (1931 novel), 379–80; *Malice Aforethought* (1931 novel), 377, 379
Cradle Will Rock, The (1938), 64
Craven, Frank, 249
Crawford, Joan, 169, 218, 402
Crazy House (1943), 409, 427–28
Crazy Lady films, 198, 227, 316–21, 336
Crime Doctor series (1943–47), 310
Crime Doctor's Warning (1945), 78
Crime et châtiment (1935), 26
crime/investigation plot: in contemporary films, 474; in 1940s films, 377 (*see also* police procedural films)
Crime without Passion (1934), 286
Criminal Court (1946), *213*
Criss Cross (1949), 146, 277
Cromwell, John, 363
Crosby, Bing, 34, 293, 359, 416–18
Crossfire (1947), 69, 92, 161, 352, 354, 398, 465
Crossroads (1942), 444
Crowd, The (1928), 343
Crowther, Bosley, 433
Cry "Havoc" (1944), 149–50
Cry Wolf (1947), 398
Cukor, George, 32, 328, 402; and *A Woman's Face*, 77
Cummings, Irving, 436
Curious Case of Benjamin Button, The (2008), 473
Curse of the Cat People, The (1944), 362, 366–68, *367*
Curtiz, Michael, 402, 467
Cutting, James E., 501n7

Daisy Kenyon (1947), 218, 222, 225, 227, 462; ellipsis, 224; and moving spotlight narration, 220–27; strategies of self-presentation of characters, 221
Dangerous Corner (1934), 51, 369
Dark Corner, The (1946), 374
Dark Mirror, The (1946), 319
Dark Passage (1947), 283–84
Dark Past, The (1949), 217, 284, 325
Dark Waters (1944), 383
Darnell, Linda, 426
Dassin, Jules, 28
Daves, Delmer, 27, 28, 283
David and Bathsheba (1951), 11
Davies, Terence, 17
Davis, Bette, 30, 32, 402
Day, Laraine, 123
Dazed and Confused (1993), 473
dead, narration by. *See* posthumous narration
Deadline at Dawn (1946), 172
Dead Man's Eyes (1944), 285
Dead Man's Walk (1943), 251
Dead of Night (1945), 180, 466
Dead Reckoning (1947), 80, 294
Dear Murderer (1947), 466
Death of a Salesman (1952), 52, 463; adaptation from play, 263–65; subjective techniques, 265
Decision of Christopher Blake, The (1948), 293
deep focus, 13, 60, 454
de Havilland, Olivia, 29, 32, 402
DeMille, Cecil B., 30, 433, 441
Deming, Barbara, 215–16
Demoiselles de Rochefort (1967), 468
Demy, Jacques, 468
Deren, Maya, 276
Desert Fury (1947), 291
Desire Me (1947), 328–30, *329*, 340
Desperate Journey (1942), 147
Destination Tokyo (1944), 148
Destiny (1944), 180, 306, 358, 516n15
Destroyer (1943), 147
Detour (1945), 278, 390
Devil Is a Woman, The (1935), 58, 73
Dial 1119 (1950), 167
Dial M for Murder (1954), 446
dialogue: and Preston Sturges, 406–8; reworked after shooting by 1940, 239; synchronization of music with, 238
Diamond, I. A. L., 125
Dickens, Charles, 47, 124; *Bleak House* (1852–53 novel), 173; *A Christmas Carol* (1843 novel), 365
Dieterle, William, 32
Dillinger (1945), 429
direct address to viewer, 63–66, 66, 192, 197, 240, 250–51, 282–83, 304, 420
directors: and 1939 agreement with studios, 489n40; cinephile, 435–39; under contract to Majors in 1940, 29; under contract to Majors in 1950, 489n46; of mystery and thriller films, 401; as producers, 27. *See also specific directors*
Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby, The: Her/Him (2013), 470
disbelieved-witness plot, 377, 447
Disney, Doris Miles, 378
Disney, Walt, 445; fantasy films considered poor investment in 1940s, 358; "feature shorts," 180–81; mixed animation with live action, 180
Dixon, Wheeler Winston, 483n4
Dmytryk, Edward, 431
D.O.A. (1950), 83, 85
Documents in the Case, The (Sayers and Eustace, 1930 novel), 174
Dodge City (1939), 11
domestic thriller, 379–84, 442–46
Donen, Stanley, 31
doppelgänger, 131
Dos Passos, John: influence on Norman Mailer, 146; *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), 49, 164, 504n5; *USA* trilogy (1930–35), 49, 53, 504n5
Dostoyevsky, Fyodor, *Crime and Punishment* (1866 novel), 377

double bills ("duals"), 19
Double Indemnity (1944), 3, 69, 70, 86–87, 146, 217, 391–92
Double Life, A (1948), 281, 291
Douglas, Kirk, 28, 157, 217
Douglas, Paul, 34
Down to Earth (1947), 358
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1932), 309, 514n16
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1941), 309, 389
Dr. Socrates (1935), 40
Dragonwyck (1946), 183, 383
Dreamers, The (Welles, unfinished film), 455, 457
Dream Girl (1948), 293
dreams, in 1940s films, 276, 298–308; "and then I woke up" device, 301–2, 330–31, 332–33, 361; for lighthearted purposes, 305–6; montage techniques, 299; and narrative peculiarity, 330–35; and portrayal of repressed impulses, 302; prophetic, 306–8; recurring dream, 303–4, 310; as schema, 42
"dream songs," 298
drive-in theaters, 24
Du Barry Was a Lady (1943), 301
Du Barry Was a Lady (DeSylva and Fields, 1939 play), 515n89
Duel in the Sun (1947), 11
du Maurier, Daphne, *Rebecca* (1938 novel), 378, 443, 515n5
du Maurier, George, *Peter Ibbetson* (1891 novel), 336, 520n45
Dumbo (1941), 180
Dunne, Philip, 40
Durrell, Lawrence, Alexandria Quartet novels, 198
Duvivier, Julien, 28, 467, 501n6; and *Flesh and Fantasy* (1943), 178; and *Lydia*, 106–7, 109–11; and *Un carnet de bal* (1937), 108–9
"dying message" convention, 75, 497n33
Dymtryk, Edward, 28
Eagle-Lion, 346
Eagle Squadron (1942), 135
Easter eggs, 27, 423, *424*
Easter Parade (1948), 11
Easy Rider (1969), 472
Eberhart, Mignon G., 375, 378
ecosystem, filmmaking as, 46
Edison, the Man (1940), 56–57, 58, 75, 210, 240, 458
Edison, Thomas, 431
editing patterns, schematic, 42
Edward, My Son (1949), 202, 251, 420
Edward, My Son (Robert Morley and Noel Langley, 1949 play), 71
ego psychology, 308
Eight Chords (*Otte akkorder*, 1944), 466
Eliot, T. S.: *The Cocktail Party* (1949 play), 310; "The Waste Land," 47
ellipses: and hidden narrative information, 15, 207–9; and hooks, 211–14; traditional markers of, 211; unmarked ellipses, 208–9, 210, 399–400, 462
Enchanted Cottage, The (1945), 362–*63*
Enchantment (1948), 268–72, *271*; single-shot transitions, 270; subjectivity, 272; voice-over narration of house, 154, 241, 270–72
Endore, Guy, *Methinks the Lady* (1945 novel), 312
Enforcer, The (1951), 93
ensemble plotting, 15, 504n11
Entr'acte (1924), 47
episode films: based on short stories, 180; mixing animation with live action and feature shorts, 180–81. *See also* block construction; converging-fates plot
Ernst, Max, 420
Eros (2004), 180
Escape (1948), 183
Escape, The (1939), 74, 75
Escape in the Fog (1945), 306–7
European modernist cinema, influenced by 1940s film innovations, 472

Eustace, Robert, 174
Eustis, Helen, *Horizontal Man* (1946 novel), 53
Eve of St. Mark, The (1944), 22, 147
Exorcist, The (1973), 478
Experiment Perilous (1944), 383
exploitation pictures, 11–12
Expressionist style, 122
Eythe, William, 37

Fallen Angel (1945), 212, 238, 399
Fallen Sparrow, The (1943), 279–81, 382, 444–45; auditory subjectivity, 280, 281, 294; inner monologue, 287, 289, 478; optical POV, 279–80; subjective POV, 290
family drama, 139–45, 152–53, 162
Family Plot (1976), 448
Fan, The (1949), 84
fan magazines, 20
Fantasia (1940), 2, 181
fantasy, in 1940s literature, radio programs, and theater, 357–58
fantasy films of 1940s, 342–43, 357–60; less successful than other genres, 357–58; remakes of in later years, 473; special rules for afterlife in, 365–70; special rules in supernatural romance tales, 360–64
Farber, Manny, 92
Farrell, James T., 53, 215
Farrow, John, 402, 469
Fassbinder, Rainer Werner, 17, 467
Faulkner, William, 47, 54; *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936 novel), 267; *As I Lay Dying* (1930 novel), 173, 252; *Intruder in the Dust* (1948 novel), 376; *The Sound and the Fury* (1929 novel), 173
Faye, Alice, 433
Fearing, Kenneth, 493n106; *The Big Clock* (1946 novel), 397; *Dagger of the Mind* (1941 novel), 252, 397
Fear in the Night (1947), 306
Fear Strikes Out (1957), 325
"feature shorts," 180–81
Federal Writers' Project, 430
Feminine Touch, The (1941), 305
Ferguson, Otis, 8, 12, 125, 129, 174, 342, 453
Feyder, Jacques, 465
F for Fake (1975), 441, 456
Field of Dreams (1989), 473
Fields, W. C., 165, 427, 505n27
Fight Club (1999), 474
Fighting Lady, The (1944), 345
Fighting Seabees, The (1944), 147
Fighting 69th (1940), 95
film history: attention to artistic dimensions of during 1930s, 429–31; awareness of in mass-market cinema, 431; circulation of older films through MoMA prints and copies for home use, 431; film revivals in 1930s and 1940s, 431; and silent film, division of audience's sense of, 430, 432
Film Index, The: A Bibliography, vol. 1, *The Film as Art* (1941), 430
film noir, 57–58, 87, 277, 489n37; "boxing noir cycle," 503n1; and Série noire collection, 469
film-within-a-film schemas, 423–29
Fingers at the Window (1942), 310
First Time, The (1952), 471
Fisher, Steve, *I Wake Up Screaming* (1940 novel), 22
Fitzgerald, F. Scott: *The Love of the Last Tycoon* (unfinished novel, 1939–40), 8–9, 214, 311, 430–31; screenplay *Infidelity* (1938), 69, 495n9; on screenwriting, 125; on "seeing" in films, 37, 242; *This Side of Paradise* (1920 novel), 47
Five Fat Years (1942–1946), 20, 228, 463
Five Fingers (1952), 183
Five Graves to Cairo (1943): characterization fitted to plot action, 126–27, 214; four-part plot structure, 127–29; restricted point of view, 199, 201–2; unequivocal protagonist, 127, 134, 152

Flamingo Road (1949), 257
flashbacks: in literature, 48, 70–72, 80; in theater and radio drama, 71
flashbacks, in film: abandonment of frame, 90–92; anchored in prototypical situations, 80–82; "architectural," 78; arousal of curiosity and uncertainty, 83–84; auditory, 77, 233, 290–92; autobiographical, 26; basic purpose of presenting events out of chronological order, 76, 80; and breadcrumb trail, 16, 87–88, 101, 104, 115, 120, 157; combination of recounting and recalling, 80; critical response to, 101; and deliberate incomprehensibility, 92–93; differing scales of, 42; and double layer of uncertainty, 83, 86; effects on viewer, 82–90; and enhancement of characterization, 84–85, 102; extensive use of in 1940s films, 67–101; flashbacks embedded in other flashbacks, 61, 93–97, 99, 100, 102, 117–18, 122, 124, 446; flashbacks freed from the character recalling or recounting, 80; as fundamental technique of 1940s films, 56–57, 67–68, 278; great man's life recalled in, 57; and hindsight bias, 87, 92, 104–5, 113; inevitability suspense, 86–87; interruptive flashbacks, 60–61, 66, 79; in investigation or trial scenarios, 81, 92; "lying" flashbacks, 92, 256, 398, 446, 466, 505n22; midsize, 85; multiple recounters in courtroom dramas, 74–75; nondiegetic and diegetic, 78–79; options, 12; parallel, 26, 69, 93–95, 117, 185–87, 505n22; patterning of, 67; and plot coherence of cause and effect, 83; from a point of crisis, 83, 97–101, 102, 218–19, 463; "prismatic," 75, 85, 102, 112–13, 117, 218; rarely used in 1930s, 69, 73; recall flashback vs. recounted flashback, 79–82, 89, 92, 242, 271; reminder flashback, 73, 77, 78, 79, 82, 90, 98–99; replay flashback, 10, 76, 77–78, 79, 82, 91, 98–99, 111, 196–97, 206, 241, 293, 295, 322, 400, 446, 466, 473–74; resistance to, 70; revelation flashback, 77, 78; schema and variation, 90–97; in silent cinema, 67–68, 73; stylistic markers of, 85–86; and subjectivity, 77, 101, 111, 122–23; unsituated character-based commentary, 82
flashforward, 328, 472, 474
Fleischer, Richard, 28, 432
Flesh and Fantasy (1943), 178–80, 358, 469, 516n15
Flesh and Fury (1952), 161
Fletcher, Louise: "The Hitch-Hiker" (1941 radio drama), 252; *Sorry, Wrong Number*, screenplay, 232; "Sorry, Wrong Number" (1943 radio drama), 231–32, 382; "The Thing in the Window" (1946 radio drama), 523n12
Flying Tigers (1942), 135
Flynn, Errol, 147
Fog, The (1980), 451
Follow Me Quietly (1949), 348
Fonda, Henry, 221
Fontaine, Joan, 123, 217
Footlight Parade (1933), 406
Ford, John, 70, 451
Foreign Correspondent (1940), 381, 442
foreign-language films, and American films of 1940s, 465–69
Forever After (1926), 72
Forever and a Day (1943), 86, 177, 266
For Whom the Bell Tolls (1943), 21
Foster, Norman, 455
Four Daughters (1938), 137
Four Girls in White (1939), 136–37
Four Hours to Kill (1935), 58, 165
Four Mothers (1940), 140
Four Poster, The (1952), 469
Four Rooms (1995), 180
Fourteen Hours (1951), 172

Four Wives (1939), 137
Foy, Bryan, 40, 42
Francis (1950), 26
Francis, Kay, 40
Frank, Melvin, 34
Frank, Waldo, *City Block* (1922 novel), 165
Frankenstein (1931), 418
French crime dramas, 26
French directors, and American thriller genre, 468
Frenzy (1972), 447–48
Freshman, The (1925), 411, 437
Freud, Sigmund, "Dreams in Folklore," 516n14
Front Page, The, 41
Fuller, Samuel, 28
Fun and Fancy Free (1948), 181
Fury (1936), 53

Gabriel over the White House (1933), 76
Galsworthy, John, 47, 48
Gang's All Here, The (1941), 11
Gangster, The (1947), 255, 257–58
Gangsters and the Girl, The (1915), 274–75
Gangway for Tomorrow (1943), 176, 203
Garbo, Greta, 168
Gardner, Erle Stanley, 375
Garson, Greer, 328
Gaslight (1944), 229, 382, 383, 393, 444, 467
Gay Sisters, The (1942), 250, 455
Gentleman Jim (1942), 155
Gentleman's Agreement (1947), 200, 218, 352, 355, 356
Gershwin, Ira, 313
Ghost (1990), 473
Ghost and Mrs. Muir, The (1947), 183, 342, 365
Ghost at Circle X Camp (1912), 438
Ghostbusters (1984), 473
Ghost Goes West, The (1938), 365
ghosts, in 1940s films, special rules for, 365–67
"Ghost Ship" (1940 radio drama), 252
Gibbons, Cedric, 29
Gide, André, 48
Gielgud, Val, 380
Girl in the News, The (1940), 466
Girl Shy (1924), 343
Gish, Lillian, 431
Glamour Boy (1941), 424–25
Glass Menagerie, The (1950), 80, 171
Godard, Jean-Luc, 17, 468
Godden, Rumer: *Black Narcissus* (1939 novel), 265; idea that time is not consecutive, 266–67, 513n16; *The River* (1946 novel), 265; *Take Three Tenses: A Fugue in Time* (1945 novel), 266–69, 513nn16–17
Godfather, The (1972), 478
Goetz, William, 29
Goffman, Erving, 221
Going My Way (1944), 464
Golden Boy (1939), 155
Gold Rush, The (1925), 431
Goldsmith, Martin, *Shadows at Noon* (1943 novel), 174
Goldwyn, Samuel, 27, 32, 137, 142
Gombrich, Ernst, 41, 42
Gone Girl (2014), 474
Gone with the Wind (1940), 14, 21, 124, 250, 478
Good Fairy, The (1935), 409
Goodis, David, 378
Gordon, Ruth, 34
Gorelik, Mordecai, 452
Gorky, Maxim, *The Lower Depths* (1902 play), 163
Graduate, The (1967), 472
Grand Hotel (1932), 58, 146, 162, 163–70, 418; as first "all-star picture," 165; limitation of action in space and time, 202; running time, 168; winner of Best Picture Academy Award, 165
Grand Hotel template (converging-fates plot), 58, 146, 163–69, 172, 505n15
Grandmaster, The (2013), 475
Grant, Cary, 21, 34, 418, 443
Grapes of Wrath, The (1941), 352, 356
Grauman, Sid, 426

Gravity (2013), 470
Great Depression, 19
Great Dictator, The (1941), 432–33
Great Gatsby, The (1949), 90
Great Man's Lady, The (1942), 373, 458
Great McGinty, The (1940), 68, 405, 436
Great Moment, The (1944), 70, 327–28, 340, 411, 472
Great Rupert, The (1950), 358
Great Train Robbery, The (1903), 430
Greed (1924), 343
Greene, Graham, 378, 382
Green Pastures (1936), 178
Griffith, D. W., 77, 201, 410, 430; Los Angeles retrospective, 432; special Academy Award in 1935, 431
Grindhouse (2007), 180
Grindon, Leger, 503n1
Groundhog Day (1993), 464
Gruber, Frank, 522n4
Guadalcanal Diary (1943), 150
Guest in the House (1944), 86, 90, 171, 192, 196, 246–47
Guilt of Janet Ames, The (1947), 335–40, *338*, 465; satire on psychoanalytic films, 337, 339
Guilty, The (1947), 210
Gun for Hire, The (1942), *345*
Gung Ho! (1943), 150–51
Guns of Navarone, The (1961), 473
Guy Named Joe, A (1944), 365

H. M. Pulham, Esq. (1941), 68, 215, 235, 278–79
Hagan, James, *One Sunday Afternoon* (1933 play), 369, 499n51
Hail the Conquering Hero (1944), 405, 409, 436
Halls of Montezuma (1951), 147
hallucinations, 294, 353
Hamilton, Bruce, *Middle-Class Murder* (1938 novel), 312
Hamilton, Clayton, *Problems of the Playwright* (1917), 48
Hamilton, Patrick: *Angel Street* (1938 play), 380, 393; *Gaslight* (1938 play), 380, 393; *Hangover Square* (1941 novel), 377, 390, 393; *Rope* (1929 play), 377, 380, 393
Hamlet (1948), 171, 454
Hammett, Dashiell, 378, 397
Handmaiden, The (2016), 475
Hangover, The (2009), 470
Hangover Square (1945), 77, 217, 310, 383, 390
Hannaford, Jake, 457
Happy Land (1943), 344, 365, 368
Hardcore Henry (2016), 471
Hard Way, The (1943), 79, 81, 215
Harrington, Curtis, 276
Harris, Mark, 484n6
Hart, Moss, *Lady in the Dark* (1941 play), 313
Hart, William S., 215, 423–24
Harvey (1950), 358
Hateful Eight, The (2015), 470
Hathaway, Henry, 39, 41
Hawks, Howard, 25, 70, 520n42
Hays Code. *See* Motion Picture Production Code
Hayward, Susan, 217
Heart of Darkness (Welles, unfinished film), 250, 282, 452–53, 454–55, 457, 460
Hearts of the World (1918), 432
Heat (1986), 348
Heaven Can Wait (1978), 473
Hecht, Ben, 47, 107, 315, 376, 397, 427; *Lily of the Valley* (1942 play), 252
heist or caper film, 145–46, 468
Hellinger, Mark, 28, 348–49
Hellman, Lillian, *The Searching Wind* (1944 play), 89
Hellzapoppin' (1941), 409, 418, 428, 435
Hemingway, Ernest, 54; "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," 69
Henry, O., 236; "Roads of Destiny" (short story), 359
Henry V (1944), 171
Here Comes Mr. Jordan (1941), 369–70
Hergesheimer, Joseph, 48, 184; *Java Head* (1919 novel), 48; *Three Black Pennies* (1917 novel), 48

Her Highness and the Bellboy (1945), 305
Herman, Lewis, 70, 93, 96
Hermann, Bernard, 440
He Walked by Night (1948), 347, 348
High and Dizzy (1920), 437
High Noon (1952), 172, 215
Highsmith, Patricia, 468; *Strangers on a Train* (1950 novel), 447, 532n28; "Suspense in Fiction" (1954 essay), 384, 385, 386, 387, 391, 393, 532n28
High Wall (1947), 318, 321
Hilton, James, 22
Himes, Chester, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945 novel), 298
hindsight bias, 87, 92, 104–5, 113
Hiroshima mon amour (1959), 472
His Girl Friday (1940), 16, 34, 41, 45, 407
His New Job (1915), 426
Histoire du cinéma (Bardèche and Brasillach), 429
Hitchcock, Alfred: adaptation of play *Rope*, 393–94; adaptations, 447; and art of suspense, 385; and bifurcated plot structures, 449–50; distinction between detective story and thriller, 445; distinction between suspense and surprise, 200, 445, 531n18; and domestic madness films, 383; films of 1940–43 as launch for later suspense films, 442–43; and flashbacks, 70; as foremost theorist of the thriller genre, 445; import of British conception of thriller, 381; independence, 25; juggling of mystery and suspense, 448; and *Lifeboat* (1944), 171–72; magazine and television show, 440; as master of adjacent media, 440; models for other filmmakers to follow, 444–45, 451; narrative continuity, 453; optical point-of-view shots, 195, 282, 320; and *The Paradine Case* (1947), 81; part owner of Universal Studios, 441; pictorialism, 451–52; popularity of thrillers in 1940s, 26; as public performer, 441; and *Rebecca*, 443; reliance on basic 1940s formal trends in later work, 446–51; reputation among cinephiles, 441; and restricted knowledge and subjective viewpoints, 443, 450; and Selznick, 27, 30, 33, 70; and semidocumentary format, 446; source of ideas, 1; *Suspense* (radio program), 71, 379, 440, 445; and *Suspicion*, 530n6; template for woman-in-peril and man-on-the-run plots, 442; worldwide reputation, 441. *See also specific films*
Hitler Gang, The (1944), 346
Hitler's Children (1943), 346
Hi-Yo Silver! (1940), 494n2
Hobson, Laura Z., *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947 novel), 352
Hoch, Edward D., 497n33
Hold Back the Dawn (1941), 69, 247, 251, 427
Holden, William, 217
Holding, Elisabeth Sanxay, 382
Holiday Inn (1942), *163*
Hollywood Canteen (1944), 32, 163
Hollywood Cavalcade (1939), 433, 436
Hollywood film, four-part structure, as macro schema, 42, 501n7
Hollywood film industry, 1940s: acquisition of best-selling novels and Broadway plays, 22, 52; aesthetic competition, 30; and avant-garde culture, 47; corruption and backstabbing, 35; crash of with ending of war, 22–24; cross-promotion of films with other industries, 20–21; disciplined production and aesthetic variation, 24–26; Five Fat Years (1942 to 1946), 18–22; foreign influences, 26–27; as greatest U.S. contribution to world art in 1940s, 16; increased creative authority, 27–28; loanouts, 30;

Hollywood film industry (*continued*) nepotism, 29; new talent, 28; norms of style and storytelling, 25; pressure toward novelty, 10; principle of narrative continuity, 125–26, 174; response to antimonopoly pressures, 435; schema and revision, 35–46; sources of innovation, 24–29; trade secrets, 30. *See also* Big Five studios (MGM, Paramount, 20th Century-Fox, Warner Bros., RKO); cooperative competition; Little Three studios (Columbia, Universal, United Artists); Majors (Big Five plus Little Three)
Hollywood Revue of 1929 (1929), 162–63
Hollywood Story (1951), 528n30
Holt, Jack and Tim, 438
Home of the Brave (1949), 12, 40, 172, 324–25, 355
Home Sweet Homicide (1946), 403
Homicide (1949), 246
Honey Pot, The (1967), 198
Hong Sang-soo, 498n41
hooks, 211–14; and continuity, 212; and deceptiveness, 212–14; visual, *212*
Hope, Bob, 21, 34, 287; self-referential gags, 416–18
Hopper, Hedda, 68
Horn Blows at Midnight, The (1945), 358
Horney, Karen, 311, 312
horror films: and gradually revealing moments, 208; mostly B films in 1940s, 358; and psychoanalysis, 517n26; subjective narration in, 278
Hospital, The (1939), 493n106
Hotel Berlin (1945), 57, 168
hotel plots, 165. See also *Grand Hotel* (1932); Grand Hotel template (converging-fates plot)
House by the River, The (1950), 292, *293*, 382, 392–93
Houseman, John, 484n11
House of Strangers (1949), 183
House on 92nd Street, The (*Now It Can Be Told*) (1945), 245, 344, 345–46, 349, *350*
Howard, Bill, 240
How Green Was My Valley (1941), 2, 16, 341, 462, 510n11; abandoned frame, 90–91; Best Picture of 1941, 69; characters reacting to historical process, 141–42; single, long flashback, 85, 240; unsituated character-based commentary, 82
How I Met Your Mother (television program), 470
Huettig, Mae, 487n4
Hughes, Dorothy B., 374, 382
Hughes, Howard, 11, 160–61
Hull, Richard, *The Murder of My Aunt* (1935 novel), 377
Human Comedy, The (1943), 2, 142, 152, 172, 425; posthumous narration, 252–53, 259, 462
Humberstone, H. Bruce, 402
Humble, Nicola, 140
Humoresque (1947), 203–4
Huston, John, 27, 29
Hutton, Betty, 427, 434

I, Jane Doe (1948), 81
I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang (1932), 357
I Confess (1953), 448, 450, 452
Ide, Leonard, *These Few Ashes* (1928 play), 75
Identity (2003), 474
Identity Unknown (1945), 7
I Don't Care Girl, The (1953), 471
If I Had a Million (1932), 176, 183
If I Hang (1940), 389
If I Were You (Fox and Levy, 1938 play), 520n43
I Love a Mystery (1945), 93
I Love You Again (1941), 7
Images (1972), 472
imagination (daydreams, visions, fantasies), in 1940s films, 292–94, *293*. *See also* dreams, in 1940s films; fantasy films of 1940s

imagination (daydreams, visions, fantasies), on stage and radio, 292–94, 369–70
I Married an Angel (1941), 305
I Married a Witch (1942), 358, 410
Immortal Story, The (1969), 454
In a Lonely Place (1950), 204–6, *205*, 216, 402
Inception (2010), 340, 473
independent filmmakers, reliance on studio facilities and distribution system, 27–28
Indignation (2016), 470
Infidelity (1938), 69, 495n9
Inglourious Basterds (2009), 473–74
Ingster, Boris, 57, 58, 278
in-jokes and gags, 34–35, 169, 182, 416–18, 436
inner monologue: in nineteenth-century and modernist fiction, 49, 276, 286, 290; in radio drama, 286, 290; on the stage as soliloquy, 286, 290
inner monologue, in film, 66; and character development, 288–89; distributed among characters, 288; second-person direct address, 287; and sound technology, 286; and subjective narration, 43, 278, 285–90, 323; as voice-over commentary, 278, 279, 286–87
Inner Sanctum series (1943–45), *251*, 273, 295
innovative storytelling, of 1940s. *See* 1940s films (1939 to 1952)
Inside Man (2006), 474
Insider, The (1999), 470
International, 29
International House (1933), 58, 165
In the Good Old Summertime (1949), 473
In the Palm of Your Hand (*En la palma de tu mano*, 1951), 466
Intruder in the Dust (1949), 352, 354, 386
Invasion USA (1952), 293–94
Invisible Man, The (1934), 31
Invitation to the Dance (1956), 469
In Which We Serve (1942), 26, 466
I Remember Mama (1948), 22, 82, 141, 145, 247–*48*
I Remember Mama (1944 play) (Van Druten and Forbes), 71
Italian Neorealist films, 342
It All Came True (1940), 171
It Happened in Hollywood (1937), 426
It Happened Tomorrow (1944), 360, 372
It's a Great Feeling (1949), 410, 427
It's a Wonderful Life (1947), 3, 28, 69, 336, 342, 368–70, 373; biography-of-the-exemplary-man schema, 368; forking-path plot ("reset" device), 369–70
It's in the Bag (1944), 425–26
It's My Own Funeral (1944 novel), 376
Ivy (1947), 387
I Wake Up Screaming (1941), 68, 69, 377
I Walk Alone (1948), 387
I Walked with a Zombie (1943), 247, 374
I Wanted Wings (1941), 86
I Want You (1951), 142

Jackson, Charles, *Lost Weekend* (1944 novel), 298, 318
Jacobs, Lea, 238
Jacobs, Lewis, *The Rise of the American Film*, 429, 437
Jacobs, Steven, 420
Jacob's Ladder (1990), 474
James, Henry, 18, 47, 48; *The Awkward Age* (1899 novel), 173; *The Golden Bowl* (1904 novel), 459; and psychological mystery stories, 525n44; *The Turn of the Screw* (1898 novella), 522n49; *The Wings of the Dove* (1902 novel), 173
James, William, "stream of thought," 296
Jane Eyre (1944), 22, 382
Janeway, Elizabeth, 220–21
Jealousy (1945), 289–90
Jepson, Selwyn, *Outrun the Constable* (1948 novel), 531n21
Jigsaw (1949), 344

Johnny O'Clock (1946), 210
Johnson, Chic, 427, 428, 436
Johnson, Nunnally, 330, 515n11
Johnson, Van, 151–52, 169
Jolson, Al, *419*
Jolson Sings Again, *419*
Jolson Story, The (1947), 24, *419*
Jones, Jennifer, 123, 217
Journey in the Dark (1943), 368
Journey into Fear (1943), 382, 454, 455
Joyce, James, 47, 48, 54; *Ulysses* (1922 novel), 47, 49, 103, 164, 173, 290
Julieta (2016), 475
Just Like Heaven (2005), 473

Kafka, Franz, 47
Kane, Kathryn, 503n21
Kanin, Garson, 34, 475
Kantor, MacKinlay, *Signal Thirty-Two* (1950 novel), 347
Kar-wai, Wong, 475
Kathleen (1942), 292
Kazan, Elia, 28, 171, 262, 263, 402
Keaton, Buster, 343, 433
Keeper of the Flame (1942), 101, 216, 374
Kelly, Gene, 32, 419
"Ken Murray's Blackouts," 32
Keyes, Evelyn, 29
Key Largo (1948), 171
Keys of the Kingdom (1945), 81
Keystone Kops, 433
Killers, The (1946), 93, 134, 196, 248–49
Killing, The (1955), 471
Kind Lady (1951), 382
King Kong, reissues of, 21
King of Jazz, The (1930), 163
King of the Underworld (1939), 40
Kingsley, Sidney, *Ten Million Ghosts* (1936 play), 76
Kings Row (1942), 135, 310
Kiss Me Goodbye (1982), 473
Kiss of Death (1947), 249
Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye (1950), 91, 196
Kitty Foyle (1940), 68, 117, 463; auditory flashback, 77; framing of flashbacks, 240; and hindsight bias, 104–5; mirror reflection providing voice-over, 103–5, *104*, 106, 478; optical distortions, *105*; pantomime prologue, 105–6; restriction of flashbacks to character's perception, 116; silent-film pastiche, 424; snow globe as lead-in to flashbacks, 52, 103, *104–5*, 106–7, 500n2
Klempner, John, *A Letter to Five Wives* (1945 novel), 136, 184, 189, 506n7
Knight, Eric, *This Above All* (1941 novel), 71–72
Knock on Any Door (1949), 355
Korda, Alexander, 123
Korshak, Melvin, 520n42
Kracauer, Siegfried, 4
Kramer, Stanley, 263

L.A. Confidential (1997), 460
Ladd, Alan, 21
Ladies in Retirement (1941), 387, 444
Ladies of the Chorus (1949), 93
Lady Be Good (1941), 85
Lady Eve, The (1941), 405, 410, 411
Lady from Shanghai, The (1948), 453, 455–56, 468
Lady Gambles, The (1949), 355
Lady in the Dark (1944), 313–14, 341
Lady in the Lake, The (1947), 282–*83*, 304, 471
Lady on a Train (1945), 238–39, 377
Lady Vanishes, The (1938), 381
Lady Windermere's Fan (1926), 84
La fête à Henriette (1952), 467
La guerre est finie (1966), 472
Lake House, The (2006), 473
L'alibi (1937), 26
L'amore (1948), 509n3
Lamour, Dorothy, 417
Lancaster, Burt, 28, 217, 218
Landru, Henri, 394
Lane, Tamar, 9
Lang, Fritz, 27, 28, 53; and MoMA traveling silent-film programs, 431; pictorialism, 451; and *Secret Beyond the Door*, 401; and the

thriller genre, 402; and *The Woman in the Window*, 330, 331; and *You Only Live Once* (1937), 212
Langley, Adria Locke, *A Lion Is in the Streets* (1945 novel), 72, 352
Langley, Noel, 515n8
La ronde (1950), 467
Last Command, The (1928), 73
Last Moment, The (1928), 72
Last Warning, The L (1929), *10*, 47
Late George Apley, The (1947), 183
Latimer, Jonathan, 374
Laughton, Charles, 217, 402
Laura (1944), 383, 511nn26–27; dissonant voice-overs as result of postproduction reworking, 256–60, *257–58*, 327, 401; lying flashback, 256; reworking of earlier devices, 39
Laurents, Arthur, 324
Lawless, The (1950), 355, 356
Lean, David, 533n4
Leave Her to Heaven (1946), 70, 83, 374, 384, 387
Le doulos (1962), 468
Leigh, Janet, 22
Leisen, Mitchell, 247, 251, 427
Le jour se lève (1939), 26
Leopard Man, The (1943), 469
Le petit soldat (1960), 468
Le plaisir (1952), 467
LeRoy, Mervyn, 29, 32
Les diaboliques (1955), 469
Les Girls (1957), 471
Les parents terribles (1948), 170–71
Les sept péchés capitaux (1962), 180
Lesser, Sol, 59, 61
"Let's Go to the Movies" (1949), 431
Let's Live a Little (1948), 429
Letter, The (1941), 40, 216
Letter from an Unknown Woman (1948), 81, 245, 292
Letter to Three Wives, A (1949), 183, 185–90, *188*, 463; brisk movement, 192; classical four-part structure, 187; mystery conventions, 373; shift from one restricted episode to another, 203; triple parallel flashbacks, 69, 117, 185–87; voice-over narration, 188, 190, 506n13
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Agee and Evans 1941 novel), 351
Levin, Harry, 48, 54
Levin, Meyer, *Citizens* (1940 novel), 351
Lewin, Albert, 27, 35, 420–23, 424, 527n8
Lewis, Jerry, 28, 441
Lewis, Sinclair, *Kingsblood Royal* (1947), 352
Lewton, Val, 161, 445
Liberty Films, 28
Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (1943), 26
Life Begins (1932), 165, 167
Lifeboat (1944), 57, 171–72, 446
Life magazine, 345
Life of an American Fireman (1903), 299
Life of Vergie Winters, The (1934), 58, 74, 286
Life with Father (1947), 22, 140–41, 145
Lightman, Herb A., 273–74
Limitless (2011), 470
Lindner, Robert, *Rebel without a Cause* (1944 book), 312
Lippert, Robert, 154
literary method, studies of, 48
literature: adaptation of middlebrow modernist works to film, 261–72, 471; amnesia as common narrative device in, 5–7; division of plot into sections, 173–74; flashbacks in, 48, 70–71, 80; posthumous narration in, 252; stream of consciousness in, 296; subjective narration in, 49, 276; women's literature, middlebrow, 140. *See also* moderate (middlebrow) modernism; novel
Little Foxes, The, 30
Little Three studios (Columbia, Universal, United Artists), 19

Little Tokyo (1942), 346
Litvak, Anatole, 28, 232, 235, 323
Living Newspaper productions, 64, *76*
Lloyd, Harold, 343, 411, 433, 437
loanouts, 30
location, filming on: compensations of, 344; in New York City, 519n13; and portable lighting and faster film stock, 344; as result of wartime quota on set materials, 344; as selling point for film, 344; in silent filmmaking, 343; and urban chase sequence, 348
Locket, The (1947), 94, 117–23, *121*, *123*, 127, 200, 383, 384; blend of traditional and emerging schemas, 122–23; breadcrumb trail laid in core flashback, 120; flashbacks, and complexity of characterization, 219; flashbacks concentrating on one character after another, 203; flashbacks embedded in other flashbacks, 117–18; linking of protagonist with Cassandra, 120–*21*
Lockwood, Don, 435
Lodger, The (1944), 282, 381, 382, 383, 384, 387–88
London Film Society, 430
Long Night, The (1947), 26, 34, 87
Long Voyage Home, The (1940), 172
Lord of the Rings films, 473
Los Angeles gasworks, as film location, 344, *345*
Lost Boundaries (1949), 87, 355
Lost Highway (1997), 340
Lost Weekend, The (1945), 12, 309, 353–54
Love from a Stranger (1937), 443
Love from a Stranger (1947), 382
Love Letters (1945), 6
Lowndes, Marie Belloc, *The Lodger* (1913 novel), 377–78, 442
Lubbock, Percy, *The Craft of Fiction*, 48, 199
Lubin, Arthur, 32, 402
Lubitsch, Ernst, 84
Luck of the Irish, The (1948), 358
Lumière, Auguste and Louis, 430
Lupino, Ida, 27, 217
Lux Radio Theatre, 20–21
Luxury Liner (1933), 165–66
Lydia (1941), 106–13, 114, 239, 277; and cause and effect in characterization, 127; ending shaped by censorship, 108; flashbacks, and complexity of characterization, 219; flashbacks, number of, 107; flashbacks, "prismatic," 112–13, 117; flashbacks, recounted, 108; flashbacks, triple, 185; flashbacks restricted to character's perception, 116, 203; hindsight bias, 113; motifs of color, music, and the sea, 109–*10*, 501n6; multiple-narrator layout, 240; musical score, 111; synesthesia motif, 109
lying flashbacks, 92, 256, 398, 446, 466, 505n22
Lynch, David, 276

M (1931), 431
Macbeth (1948), 453–54, 454, 455, 533n40
Macdonald, Dwight, 50, 59
Macdonald, Philip, *The Rynox Murder Mystery* (1930 novel), 397
MacFadyen, Virginia, *Bittern Point* (1926 novel), 50–51
Macgowan, Kenneth, 431
MacLeish, Archibald, "The Fall of the City" (1937 radio drama), 50
Macomber Affair, The (1947), 69
Macready, George, 32
macro schema, 42, 501n7
Madame Bovary (1949), 69, 81
Madonna's Secret, The (1946), 310
Magic Town (1947), 239
Magnificent Ambersons, The (1942), 16, 215; character recounting as narration, 460; ellipses, 459; homages to silent films, 438–39; inside jokes, 436, 438, 530n49; sense of unrecoverable past throughout, 458–60; voice-over

narrator in dialogue with characters, 420
Magnolia (1999), 460, 470, 511n19
Magny, Claude-Edmonde, *The Age of the American Novel*, 467
Mailer, Norman, 54; *The Naked and the Dead* (1948 novel), 49, 146
Mainwaring, Daniel, 53, 241
Major and the Minor, The (1942), 11, 35
Majors (Big Five plus Little Three), 487n4; actors, directors, and writers under contract in 1940, 29; actors, directors, and writers under contract in 1950, 489n46; A-picture strategy, 21; cooperation on technology standardization and public campaigns, 31; cost-cutting after 1947, 23; exploitation of power, 19; government anti-monopoly intervention of 1938, 19, 486n3; percentage of releases as adaptions, 22; production of more than 4,000 features between 1939 and 1952, 25
Make Mine Music (1946), 181, 531n15
Maltese Falcon, The (1941), 202, 377, 387, 398
Manhandled (1949), 310
Man Hunt (1941), 383, 444
Man in the Trunk, The (1942), 365
Mankiewicz, Herman J., 34, 76, 78, 80; and "prismatic" flashback, 75, 112, 507n19
Mankiewicz, Joseph L., 28, 124, 175, 497n31; adaptation of Lawrence Durrell's Alexandria Quartet novels, 198, 507n24; *All About Eve* (1950), 77–78, 190–98, 203, 507n15, 507n21; *The Barefoot Contessa* (1954), 198; early career as screenwriter, 182; *The Honey Pot* (1967), 198; *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949), 182, 185, 203, 506n9, 506n11; literate genre films, 183; love of fiction and drama, 183; preeminent literary writer-director of late 1940s, 27, 182; producer at MGM and later Fox, 182; and rule of "what they didn't know was," 199–200; *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1960), 198; use of block construction, 183
Mann, Anthony, 28, 402
Manners, David X., *Dead to the World* (1947 novel), 255, 376
Man on the Eiffel Tower, The (1950), 344
man-on-the-run plot, 381, 383, 387, 394–95, 402, 442, 444, 469; amnesiac twist, 183
Man to Remember, A (1938), 58, 79
Man Who Came to Dinner, The, 39
Man Who Knew Too Much, The (1934), 381, 530n8
Man with a Movie Camera, 428
March, William, *Company K* (1933 novel), 146
March of Time short subjects, 345
Marion, Frances, 9, 495n8, 502n8
Marnie (1964), 447, 450
Marriage of Maria Braun, The (1979), 467
Married and in Love (1940), 56, 58
Marshall, George, 436
Martha (1974), 467
Martin, Dean, 28
Marx, Groucho, 250
Marx Brothers, 11, 64
Mask of Dimitrios, The (1944), 382, 402
Massie, Chris, *Green Circle* (1943 novel), 72
Masters, Edgar Lee, *Spoon River Anthology* (1915), 252
Matter of Life and Death, A (aka *Stairway to Heaven*) (1946), 27
Matthews, Brander, *A Study of the Drama* (1910), 404, 405, 406, 407
Maugham, Somerset, *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919 novel), 48
Maugham, W. Somerset, *The Letter* (1927 play), 380
May, Joe, 32
Mayer, Louis B., 29
McBain, Ed, 87th Precinct books, 348

McCabe, Cameron, *The Face on the Cutting-Room Floor* (1937 novel), 397
McCarey, Leo, 25, 70
McCarthy, Mary, 59–60, 64
McCoy, Horace, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1935 novel), 71
McGerr, Pat, *Pick Your Victim* (1947 novel), 376
McKee, Robert, 241
Meet Me in St. Louis (1944), 2, 11, 16, 175, 462
Méliès, Gaston, 438
Méliès, Georges, 430, 439
melodramas, 373
Melody Time (1948), 181
Melville, Jean-Pierre, 468
Memento (2001), 6, 72, 470, 474
memory, in 1940s films: in auditory flashback, 290–92; and visual flashbacks, 292–*93*
Men, The (1950), 353
Menzies, William Cameron, 60, 517n38
Mercury Theatre productions, 452
Merrily We Roll Along (Kaufman and Hart, 1934 play), 174
Merton of the Movies (1947), 434
message films (social problem films), 11, 351–57; and conventional narrative tactics, 353–54; cross-sectional episodic structure, 356, 370; diffuse forces opposing the victim, 356; double plotline of quest for goal with romance, 352; formulaic quality, 354; goal-oriented character facing obstacles, 352; rehabilitation films, 352–53; returning veteran films, 352; secondary story lines, 356; uncertain endings, 356–57; victim and crusader as shifting protagonists, 354–56
Meyerhold, Vsevolod, 452
MGM, 22, 142, 165; Andy Hardy series of 1930s, 139–40; Pete Smith Specialties, 432; writers, 33
Midnight Mary (1933), 58, 73
Mielziner, Jo, design of Broadway productions to reflect cinematic techniques, 262–65, 264, 512n12
Mildred Pierce (1945), 3, 69, 78, 196, 218, 384, 399–400, 467
Millar, Margaret, 378
Miller, Arthur, 16, 54; criticism of film adaptation of *Death of a Salesman*, 264–65; *Death of a Salesman* (1949 play), 52, 71, 262–63, 512n4; idea of simultaneity of past and present, 263, 266
Miller, Patsy Ruth, *That Flannigan Girl* (1939 novel), 71
Mine Own Executioner (1948), 466
Ministry of Fear (1944), 382, 444
Miniver Story, The (1950), 510n17; "limited omniscient" voice-over, 242–45; textural density, 243–45, 290
Minnelli, Vincente, 28, 402
Miracle Can Happen, A (aka *On Our Merry Way*, 1948), 175–76
Miracle of Morgan's Creek, The (1944), 405, 408, 414, 436
Miracle of the Bells, The (1948), 291
Mission to Moscow (1943), 346
Mississippi Mermaid (1969), 468
Mitchell, Margaret, 22
Mitchum, Robert, 22
mob, involvement in filmmaking, 35
moderate (middlebrow) modernism, 59, 66, 101, 174; adaptation of literary works to film, 261–72, 471; blend of techniques from turn-of-century fiction and avant-garde, 49–51, 261, 266–68; techniques of inner monologue and stream of consciousness, 276; versus vernacular modernism, 492n101
modernism, 47–49; attempt to portray subjectivism across varying time periods, 262–63; borrowing of film effects by other media, 53, 261–63; moderate (*see* moderate [middlebrow] modernism); radio writers and, 51; and slice-of-life

plot, 164; and techniques against tradition, 47; theatrical, 49–50; Ultraism, 48, 50; writers of, 47–49
Money and the Woman (1940), 86
Monsieur Verdoux (1947), 394–96, *395*, 433
montage sequences: audiovisual virtuosity, 420; and dreams, 299; objective, in 1930s films, 274, 295–96; personalized, 295–*96*; in silent filmmaking, 53; and subjectivity, 274, 295–96; using headlines and voice-overs in 1930s films, *76*
Montgomery, Robert, *27*, 218, 282
Moon and Sixpence, The (1942), 421, 422
Moonrise (1948), 295–*96*
Moonrise Kingdom (2012), 511n19
Moore, Thomas, *Lallah Rookh* (1817 romance), 109, 501n5
Morley, Christopher, *Kitty Foyle* (1939 novel), 52, 103, 500n2
Motion Picture Production Code, 26, 34, 43, 108, 218, 301, 311, 331, 357, 443
Mourning Becomes Electra (1947), 175, 218
"movie moments," 37
Mr. 880 (1950), 348
Mr. and Mrs. Smith (1941), 442
Mr. Arkadin (1955), 454, 457, 533n40
Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House (1948), 251, 474
Mr. Deeds Goes to Town (1936), 33, 372
Mr. Lucky (1943), 215
Mr. Peabody and the Mermaid (1948), 358
Mrs. Miniver (1942), 27, 142, 242
Mulholland Drive (2001), 340
multiple-protagonist plotting, 16, 57, 133–39, 162, 204, 352, 470; in later mission-team films, 473
multiple-track recording, 286
multiple viewpoints, in turn-of-the-century novels, 48
Muni, Paul, 40
Munich (2006), 451
Murder! (1930), 381
Murder, He Says (1945), 418, 447
Murder, My Sweet (1944), 80, 92–93, 294, 377
Murder Culture, in popular media of 1940s, 375–76, 442
Museum of Modern Art (MoMA): canon of official film classics, 430; efforts to circulate films outside of New York, 430; exhibition of 1940 "D. W. Griffith: American Film Master," 431–32; The Film Library, 430; "Forty Years of Film Comedy," 433; most important force in creation of awareness of film culture, 430; traveling programs, 431
music: dissonant, 294; synchronization with action and dialogue, 238; theremin music, 276, 294, 354
musicals, 174; revue, 9, 162–63; romantic comedy with song, 9; special effects, 11
musical scores, and subjective narration, 276
musicians' union, 34
Musuraca, Nicholas, 57
Muybridge, Eadweard, 431
My Best Girl (1927), 44
My Cousin Rachel (1952), 219
My Darling Clementine (1946), 464–65
My Dream Is Yours (1948), 305
My Favorite Brunette (1947), 373
My Foolish Heart (1949), 26
My Life with Caroline (1941), 250, 251
My Name Is Julia Ross (1945), 229–31, 385, 444, 455
mystery: and restriction of knowledge, 448; and suspense, 449
mystery and suspense/thriller films, 15, 372–403; bystander plot, 377; and comedy, 373–74, 386; domestic thriller, 379–84, 383, 442–46, 443; exploration of methods, 200; flashbacks (*see*

mystery and suspense/thriller films (*continued*)
flashbacks); and "helper male," 443–44; hybrid forms of, 401; investigation-based plotting, 377 (*see also* police procedural films); lady murderers, 387; major source of narrative experimentation in contemporary films, 474; and melodramas, 373; mystery writers appearing in, 402–3; plot organized around actions and range of knowledge of criminal, 377; poison, portraits, and staircases, 384; and protagonist as killer/villain, 387–91; and psychological problems of characters (*see* psychoanalysis in films; psychological thriller); and restriction of information flow (*see* narrative information, manipulating); schema and revision, premise and switcheroo, 374; and sympathy for villain, 217, 386–91; and threat of impending violence, 384; top directors of, 401; and what-they-didn't-know-was, 374
Mystery Writers of America, 376
mystery writing: block construction in, 174; hard-boiled detective fiction, 53, 72, 218, 346–47, 348, 376, 377, 379; as 40 percent of all novels in 1940, 375; pre-1940s fiction and stage plays, 376–79; serialized in magazines, 375; suspense thriller, 380; tale of international intrigue, 379; tied with adventure novels as most popular genre at all education levels in 1946, 375–76; "women's fiction" technique, 378

Naked City (1948), 288, 348–49, 350
Naremore, James, 489n37, 493n109
"narratage" technique: in Orson Welles, 455–56; in Preston Sturges, 238, 240, 249–50, 410, 455
narration, principles of: defined as strategies for transmitting or blocking story information, 15, 199–202, 237; optical and mental subjectivity (*see* subjective narration); restriction and ellipses (*see* narrative information, manipulating); voice-overs (*see* voice-over narration)
narrative information, manipulating, 15, 199–227; and accidentally overheard conversation, 211; and characterization, 214–18; and hooks, 211–14; limits on space and time, 170–71, 202; motivation for suppression of information, 209–10; moving-spotlight narration, 202, 209, 210, 219–27, 289, 450; multiple-perspective strategy, 203; regulation of viewer knowledge moment by moment, 203–4; restricted and unrestricted, interplay between, 228–36; restriction to single character, 202; restriction used to heighten suspense and probe the mind of dangerous character, 204–6; suppression of information, strategies of, 206–11; suppression of information in telephone conversation, 203–4; and transitions, 212–14. *See also* ellipses
Narrow Margin, The (1952), 171
Nashville (1975), 170, 472
Naturalism in literature and drama, 164
Nebenzal, Seymour, 331–32, 334, 496n13
Neff, Walter, 217
Never Fear (1950), 353
Never Give a Sucker an Even Break (1942), 427
New Hollywood: and postwar European modernist cinema, 472; 1940s as first manifestation of, 478
newsreel footage, inserted, 428

newsreels, staged according to studio norms, 345
Night and Day (1946), 11
Night Has A Thousand Eyes (1948), 255, 469
Nightmare Alley (1942), 215, 218, 294
Night Must Fall (1937), 218, 381
"Night of the Blizzard" (1941 magazine short story), 133, 136, 137
1930s films: action and terse conversation, 8; assimilation of sound into storytelling tradition, 9; fear of creating canned theater, 170; and fluidity of 1920s storytelling, 9–10; objective montage sequences, 76, 274, 295–96; rarity of flashbacks in, 69, 73; rarity of voice-overs in features, 76, 238; screwball comedy, 10, 182, 372, 404; subjective narration in, 274–75
1940s films (1939 to 1952), precedents and innovations: clarity of classical filmmaking tradition, 52; cumulative process of innovation, 463–64; direct address to viewer, 63–66, 66, 192, 197, 240, 250–51, 282–*83*, 304, 420; emphasis on theatrical space and time, 170–71; expression of character through action, 37; fantasy, 15, 66, 292–94; film-within-a-film schemas, 423–29; flashback as fundamental technique, 56–57, 67–101, 278 (*see also* flashbacks); High Forties imagery, 58; and *how* of storytelling, 2, 45, 463; influences on later and contemporary films in US and abroad, 470–75, 535n24; institutional constraints on new techniques, 52–53; matching of running time with plot time, 159, 172; narrative innovation, 3–4, 10–13; and narrative peculiarity, 327–40; precedents of and recasting of earlier techniques, 46–55, 172; quasi-documentary realism, 15; references to silent movies, 106; replayed scenes, 196, 473; sources of innovation, 35; synchronization of senses, 290; temporal concentration, 159; violence and sexual suggestion, increase in, 26. *See also* dreams; self-conscious artifice (reflexivity); subjective narration, in film; voice-over narration; *and specific filmic elements*
1940s films, studies of, 4–7
Nolan, Christopher, 3, 17, 276
No Man of Her Own (1950), 373
No More Vices (1948), 251
None Shall Escape (1944), 81, 251
Nora Prentiss (1947), 249
North by Northwest (1959), 449
North West Mounted Police (1940), 30
Nothing Sacred, 372
Notorious (1946), 16, 21, 445–46
novel: block construction in turn-of-the-century, 48; chapters segmenting plot or radically shifting narration, 173; "death of," 54; interwar, 50; mystery, 50; turn-of-the-century, and innovations of 1940s films, 47–48, 124
Now, Voyager (1942), 44, 90
No Way Out (1950), 183

O. Henry's Full House (1952), 180
Oberon, Merle, 123
Objective, Burma! (1945), 147
Oboler, Arch, 71; adaptation of *Johnny Got His Gun* for radio (1941), 51, 277; "Alter Ego" (1938 radio play), 314, 517n36; and *Bewitched* (1945), 117, 314; *Lights Out* radio series, 51; and literary stream of consciousness in radio, 277, 286, 513n7, 514n24; sound montages, 239
Odets, Clifford, *Waiting for Lefty* (1935 play), 50
Odyssey (Homer), 47, 70
Oklahoma! (1943 musical), "fantasy ballets," 292

Olivier, Laurence, 171, 454
Olsen, Ole, 427, 428, 436
omniscient narration, 63–65, 201, 508n5
On Approval (1944), 466
Once More, My Darling (1949), 426
Once Upon a Time (1944), 358
One Crowded Night (1940), 57, 58, 167, 238
One Exciting Night (1940), 344
One Foot in Heaven (1941), 423–24
One Hour with You (1932), 64, 250
O'Neill, Eugene: *Days without End* (1934 play), 49; *The Iceman Cometh* (1946 play), 163; sea plays, 172; *Strange Interlude* (1928 play), 286
One Touch of Venus (1947), 342, 358
On the Town (1949), 2–3, 11, 136, 172, 344
Ophüls, Max, 28, 402, 467
optical point-of-view (POV) shots, 195, 275, 276, 278, 279–*80*, 281–85, 320, 353, 354
Orr, Mary, "The Wisdom of Eve" (1946 *Cosmopolitan* story), 190–91
Othello (1955), 453, 454, 455, 458, 533n40
Others, The (2001), 474
Other Side of the Wind, The (Welles, unfinished film), 455, 457
Our Town (1940): approach/retreat in opening and closing, 63–64; cemetery climax, 252; characters as narrators, *65*–66, 248; direct address, 63–66, 240, 250; distribution of inner monologues among characters, 288; embedded flashback, 61; Grover's Corners as Gothic, *60*; hallucinatory sequence, 61–63, *62*; low angle of family breakfast, *60*; omniscient commentary of narrator, *63*–65, 201; voice-off questioners, 64
Outlaw Women (1952), 40
Out of Sight (1998), *476–77*, 478
Out of the Past (1947), 53, 241, 383, 387
Outward Bound (1930), 361, 520n45
Over 21 (1945), 171
Owen, Wilfred, "Strange Meeting" (1918 poetic monologue), 252

Paleface, The (1948), 287
Palm Beach Story, The (1942), 405–*6*, 411
Panama, Norman, 34
Panama Lady (1939), 284
Pandora and the Flying Dutchman (1951), 361–62, 421–22
Panic in the Streets (1950), 348
Panic Room (2002), 451
Panique (1947), 467
Paradine Case, The (1947), 81, 446
Paramount, 33, 418, 427
"Paramount Case" (1948 Supreme Court decision), 19, 23
Paranormal Activity series, 470
paranormal romance, influenced by 1940s films, 473
Paris, je t'aime (2006), 180
Parker, Dorothy, 33
Parks, Larry, *419*
Passage to Marseille (1944), 374; embedded flashbacks, 94–97, 99, 100, 102, 118, 122, 124; plot architecture, 500n61
Passer by [sic] (1912), 495n2
Pawnbroker, The (1965), 93, 472
Payment Deferred (1932), 377
Payment on Demand (1951), 512n12
Payne, John, 426
Pearls of the Crown (1937), 26
Penny Serenade (1941), 87–88
People Will Talk (1951), 183
Perdue, Virginia, *Alarum and Excursion* (1944 novel), 318
Perils of Pauline, The (1947), 433–34, 436
personalized montage, 295–96
Peter Ibbetson (1935), 361, 520n45
Petrified Forest, The (1936), 170
Petrillo, James, 34
Petulia (1968), 93, 472
Phantom Carriage (1921), 72
Phantom Lady (1944), 57, 383–84, 402, 469

Phantom of Crestwood, The (1932), 73, 75, 238, 497n28
Phone Booth (2003), 451
Phone Call from a Stranger (1952), 92, 176
Pichel, Irving, 402
Pickup (1951), 281
Picture of Dorian Gray, The (1945), 35, 383, 421, 422–24
Pidgeon, Walter, 168
Pilot #5 (1943), 85, 373
Pinky (1949), 353
Pinocchio (1940), 180
Piper, Evelyn, *The Motive* (1950 novel), 72
Pirandello, Luigi, 59
Piscator, Erwin, 452
Pittsburgh (1942), 83–84
Playful Pluto (1934), 410, 414, 436
plots: based on secrets, deception, misunderstandings, and mistaken identities (*see* narrative information, manipulating); conflict aroused by a protagonist with goal(s), 126–30, 132–33; continuity, 125–26, 128; converging-fates plot (Grand Hotel template), 58, 146, 162, 163–70; double plots (paired-protagonists), 130–33, 152; episodic (equally weighted characters pursuing collective goal), 145–52; episodic (equally weighted characters pursuing individual goals), 139–45, 172; forking-path plot ("reset" device), 369–70; multiple-protagonist plot, 16, 57, 133–39, 162, 204, 352, 470, 473; parallelism, 132, 176, 269–70; phases of plot action, 127–29 (*see also* plot structure in classical films); and plot switches, 45; revisions of known schemas, 152–53, 173; romantic plotline as primary, 130; site-specific film, 165, 169–72, 446; slice-of-life plot, 164; time constraints, 128, 131, 165, 172; unity of visual and verbal motifs, 129, 131–32. *See also* block construction; episode films
plot structure in classical films: climax, 128; complicating action, 127–28; development, 128; epilogue, 127, 128–30; in Hitchcock films, 447–49; in *A Letter to Three Wives*, 187; setup, 127; in *The Set-Up*, 159; in *The Suspect*, 389
Plow That Broke the Plains, The (1936), 345
Point Blank (1967), 472
"point of audition," 282
police procedural films, 347–51; elimination of romantic storyline, 348; external voice-over, 347; secondary characters, 347–48
police procedural literary genre, 346–47
Polonsky, Abraham, 28, 157
popular culture, of 1940s, 16; Freudianism in, 122, 304, 308, 312; Murder Culture, 375–76; psychiatrists and psychoanalysts as comic characters in, 310; race relations and other social problems in, 352; as swap meet, 46–54
Popular Front melodramas of 1930s, 489n37
Porter, Edwin S., 299, 430
Portrait of Jennie (1949), 362–64, 367, 374, 447; motifs, 364; secondary characters, 364; and Selznick, 241, 362–64, 521n46, 527n8; transition to full color, 362, 527n8
Poseidon Adventure, The (1972), 473
Possessed (1947), 218, 319–21, 341, 383, 463
postdubbing, 239, 344
posthumous narration: in film, 252–60; through letters or journals, 252; in literature and radio drama, 252
Postman Always Rings Twice, The (1946), 26, 69, 91–92
Poverty Row, 11, 19, 25
Powdermaker, Hortense, 215
Powell, Michael, 26, 466

Power, Tyrone, 217, 218
Power and the Glory, The (1933), 73–74, 75, 81; complicated flashbacks, 373, 405; "narratage" technique, 238, 240, 249–50, 410, 455–56
Practically Yours (1944), 426, 428
Preacher's Wife, The (1996), 473
Preminger, Otto, 28, 84, 319, 402; and *Daisy Kenyon*, 222; and *Fallen Angel*, 399; and *Leave Her to Heaven*, 70, 496n12
Pressburger, Emeric, 26–27
Prestige, The (2005), 474
Price, Vincent, 32
Pride of the Marines (1945), 137, 353
Priestley, J. B.: *Bright Day* (1946 novel), 72; *Dangerous Corner* (1932 play), 49; *Time and the Conways* (1938 play), 514n30
Princess and the Pirate, The (1944), 417
Private Affairs of Bel Ami (1946), 421
prizefighting films, 154–61; "boxing noir cycle," 503n1; convention of hero becoming champion, 155; overlap among narrative conventions of 1940s films, 161; search for novelty, 161
producers, increased creative control, 27
Project Almanac (2015), 470
proletarian fiction, 351
protagonist(s): as killer/villain, 387–91; multiple-protagonist plotting, 16, 57, 133–39, 162, 204, 352, 470, 473; paired-protagonists (double plots), 130–33, 152; parallel, 117, 134, 136, 137, 475; role of, 15; shifting of role from one character to another, 134–35; as team, 147–52, 263
Prouty, Olive Higgins, *Now, Voyager* (1941 novel), 90
"psychiatricals." *See* psychoanalysis in films, 1940s
Psycho (1960): internal monologue, 447; moving-spotlight narration and ellipses, 450; split plot structure, 450
psychoanalysis, in 1940s culture, 309–10; crime fiction, 312; and dreams in all arts, 298; and horror stories, 517n26; psychiatrists and psychoanalysts as comic characters in popular culture, 310
psychoanalysis in films, 1940s, 215, 313–21, 383, 463; and characterization, 297; and extravagant imagery, 297–98; focus on rare psychiatric behaviors and quick treatment and recovery, 311; and narcosynthesis, 319, 323; "psycho film cycle" (1944 to 1950), 313; and talking cure, 312, 318, 323, 446; trauma and therapy, 321–25; use of features of Freudian theory to fit film formulas, 310–13
psychological thriller, 374, 380–81, 382, 384–85, 524n28
Public Enemy, The (1931), 311
Pulp Fiction (1994), 72, 78, 470
pulp writers, 22, 71
Purple Heart, The (1944), 294
Pursued (1947), 310, 341, 374

Quartet (1948), 180
Quo Vadis (1951), 11

race relations, in 1940s popular culture, 352, 520n31
Radio City Music Hall, 18
radio drama: *Dragnet* (1949), 347; flashbacks in, 71; and modernism, 50; mystery programs, 375; posthumous narration, 252, 254, 255; shifting narrators, 64, 196; soliloquy ("first-person singular" and stream of consciousness), 286, 290; sound montages, 53, 239; subjective techniques, 277; *Suspense* (radio program), 71, 379, 440, 445; versions of popular films, 20–21; and voice-over narration, 239
radio performers, move to films, 21
Raffles (1930), 377

Rage in Heaven (1941), 381
Rain (1932), 41, 44
Rains, Claude, 93, 96
Random Harvest (1942), 6, 209, 210, 487n5
range of character knowledge, and rule of "what they didn't know was," 199–200, 374. *See also* narrative information, manipulating
Rapper, Irving, 44
Rashomon (1950), 465
Raw Deal (1948), 288–89
Rear Window (1954), 377, 447, 449, 452, 469
Rebecca (1940), 2, 30, 44–45, 124, 240, 247, 257, 374, 381
Reckless Moment, The (1949), 217, 382
Red Ball Express (1952), 249, 458
Red House, The (1947), 374
Red Pony, The (1949), 292–93
Red River (1948), 11, 134, 215, 217
rehabilitation films, 352–53
Reisch, Walter, 34
reissues, 21
Reluctant Dragon, The (1941), 180
Remarkable Andrew, The (1942), 344
Remarque, Erich Maria, 22
Renoir, Jean, 28, 431
Rentschler, Eric, 467
Repeat Performance (1947), 359–60, 369, 370, 465
repetition, of forms, 13; significant repetition, 39; and switcheroo, 40–41. *See also* schema
Resnais, Alain, 472
returning-veteran films, 161, 352
Return of January, The (1948), 91
revue musical, 9, 162–63
Rhubarb (1950), 34
Rice, Elmer, 49; *Street Scene* (1929 play), 164–65; *On Trial* (1914 play), 71, 75, 496n19
Ride 'em, Cowboy (1942), 305
Ride the Pink Horse (1947), 382
Right Cross (1950), 161
Rinehart, Mary Roberts, *The Circular Staircase* (1908 novel), 377
Ringside (1949), 79, 154–55, 156, 157, 241
River, The (1938), 345
RKO, 56, 160–61; "Flicker Flashbacks," 432
Roach, Hal, 433
road shows, return on, 21
Road to Bali, The (1952), 416, 417
Road to Singapore, The (1940), 416
Road to Utopia, The (1945), 416
Roaring Twenties, The (1939), 33, 76, 240, 510n10
Robbins, Harold, *The Dream Merchants* (1950 novel), 435
Robinson, Casey, 44
Robson, Mark, 28, 161, 402
Rogers, Ginger, 123, 168
Rogers, Joel Townsley, *The Red Right Hand* (1945 novel), 72, 398
Rohmer, Éric, 467–68
Romm, Dr. May, 517n37
Room (2015), 470
Root, Lynn, *Cabin in the Sky* (1941 play), 515n9
Root, Wells, 69
Rope (1948), 28, 171, 172, 386, 446
Rosemary's Baby (1968), 451
Rossellini, Roberto, 509n3
Rossen, Robert, 70, 157
Rosten, Leo, 14
Roth, Claudia Pierpont, 54
Rotha, Paul, *The Film Till Now* (1931), 430
Roughly Speaking (1945), 249
Roxie Hart (1942), 69, 84
Rózsa, Miklós, 501n6
Run Lola Run (1998), 359
Ruthless (1948), 57
Ryan, Robert, 217

Sabotage (1936), 381
Saboteur (1942), 381, 442
Safety Last (1923), 437
Salinger, J. D., 16, 54
Saludos Amigos (1943), 180–81
Samson and Delilah (1950), 11, 24
Sanders, George, 402
Sands of Dee (1912), 425

Saroyan, William, 432; on *The Human Comedy* film, 145; *The Human Comedy* (1943 novel), 142
Sarris, Andrew, 14, 17
Sartre, Jean-Paul, 467
Saw (2004), 474
Sayers, Dorothy, 174, 517n26
Scared to Death (1947), 81, 254
Scarlet Street (1945), 383
Schary, Dore, 24, 32
schema, narrative, 35–46; biography of the exemplary man, 368; and clarity, 475–78; film-within-a-film, 423–29; Grand Hotel (converging-fates), 58, 146, 163–69, 172, 505n15; macro schema, 42, 501n7; as pattern that can be combined with other schema, 464; precedents of, 44; and prizefighting films, 154–61; recycling of 1940s innovations in later decades, 473; revisions of schemas, 38, 41–42, 45, 152–53, 173; rising-star films, 435; as set of options, 42–43; solutions to artistic problems, 41; and strategies of storytelling, 43; symmetrical opening and closing, 44, *236*. *See also* dreams, in 1940s films; switcheroo
Scheuer, Philip K., 515n10
science fiction films, 520n42; associated with pulp magazines and children's serials in 1940s, 358; built on 1940s fantasy adventure films, 472
science fiction novels, 357
Scott, Lizabeth, 402
Screen Writer, The, 200
screenwriting: as collaborative process, 33–34; and the switch, or switcheroo, 40
screwball comedy, 10–11
Sealed Verdict (1948), 428
Search, The (1948), 352, 357
Searching Wind, The (1946), 88–89
Seaton, George, *But Not Goodbye* (1944 play), 358
Second Woman, The (1950), 383
Secret Agent (1936), 381
Secret Beyond the Door (1948), 400–401, 450, 462
Secret Life of Walter Mitty, The (1947), 292
Seeley, Mabel, 378
Seldes, Gilbert, *The Seven Lively Arts*, 8, 125, 174, 216, 433, 453
self-conscious artifice (reflexivity), 15, 418–23; and attitudes toward film history and cinema as an institution, 423–29; authentic footage inserted into films, 428–29; behind the scenes in film production, 9, 426–28; celebration of silent-film era, 433–39; Hope and Crosby, 416–18; movies within movies, 423–25; and the painted portrait, 420; Preston Sturges and, 409–11; resurgence of in films of 1990s and 2000s, 474; sources of, 429–33
Selznick, David O., 11, 27, 30, 32, 315; and *Gone with the Wind* (1940), 250; and Hitchcock, 33, 70; loanouts to maintain cash flow, 30; and *Portrait of Jennie* (1949), 241, 362–64, 521n46, 527n8; and *Rebecca*, 30, 44–45, 70, 443; and *Since You Went Away* (1944), 43, 44, 69–70; and *The Star-Wagon*, 359; tribute to Jennifer Jones, 123; on the voice-over, 240
semidocumentary films, 79, 342, 343–46; de Rochemont, 345–46, 349, 355; and external voice-over, 79, 241, 347, 370; Hitchcock, 446; and incorporation of news footage, 428; police procedural films, 347–51; as rapid response to news stories, 346; secondary characters, 347–48; Zanuck, 345–46
Sennett, Mack, 8, 433
Sergeant York (1941), 30, 150, 291
Série noire collection, 469
Set-Up, The (1949), 159–61, 162, 172, 199

Seven Chances (1925), 343
Seventh Cross, The (1944), 253–54, 273, 462
Shadow of a Doubt (1943), 2, 344, 381, 383, 442, 444, 462
Shadow on the Wall (1950), 203, 310
Shadows on the Stairs (1941), 293, 373–74
Shamrock Hill (1949), 358
Shaw, Irwin, *Sons and Soldiers* (1943 play), 277, 514n30
Sheldon, Edward, *Romance*, 71
Sherman, Vincent, 28, 31, 40, 42; on *Backfire*, 67
She Wouldn't Say Yes (1945), 310
Shklovsky, Victor, 373
Shock (1946), 318, 321, 377
Shoot the Piano Player (1960), 468
Shop Around the Corner, The (1940), 473
Short Cuts (1993), 470
Show Boat (1951), 510n17
Show People (1928), 426
Shutter Island (2010), 474
Side Effects (2013), 451
Sidney, George, 28, 31, 431
Sieranevada (2016), 475
Silence (1926 and 1931), 73
silent filmmaking: character narrators, 238; dream sequences, 299; fantasy images, 274; films of 1940s celebrating and condescending to, 434–44, 529n37; hook transitions, 211; location shooting, 343; montage sequences, 53; nondiegetic flashbacks, 78–79; POV shot, 282; single-shot flashback, 274; slapstick, 432–33; storytelling techniques, 10, 47; subjective effects, 274
Silent Man, The (1917), 423–24
Simenon, Georges, 378
Since You Went Away (1944), *43*, 44, 70, 202
Singin' in the Rain (1952), *419*, 435
Sin of Harold Diddlebock, The (1947; aka *Mad Wednesday*), 411, 437
Sin of Nora Moran, The (1933), 515n7
Siodmak, Robert, 28, 402, 469
Sirk, Douglas, 28, 402
Sisters (1973), 451
Sjöstrom, Victor, 72
Skelton, Red, 217, 434
Skippy (1931), 425
Skirball, Jack, 28
Skyscraper Souls (1932), 165
Slade, Caroline, 351
Slap, The (television program), 470, 534n20
slapstick comedies, 8, 432–33
slasher film, 451
Slattery's Hurricane (1949), 249
Sleep, My Love (1948), 211, 383, 402
Sleepers West (1941), 171
Sleeping City, The (1950), 350–51
Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman (1947), 83, 85, 215, 218, 352
Smiler with a Knife, The (1939, uncompleted), 76
Smith, Betty, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943 novel), 72
Smith, Lillian, *Strange Fruit* (1944 novel), 352
Smith, Murray, 290
Smith, Shelly, *Come and Be Killed* (1947 novel), 318
Smith, Thorne, 358, 521n43
Smith, William H., *The Drunkard* (1844 play), 529n37
Snake Pit, The (1948), 69, 215, 322–24, 374, 386; as "problem picture," 324, 352, 355, 356
snow globe motif, 52
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1938), 358; approach/retreat in opening and closing, 44; reissues of, 21, 521n41
Social Network, The (2010), 470
social problems: in 1940s films (*see* message films [social problem films]); in 1930s popular culture, 351; in 1940s popular culture, 352
So Dark the Night (1946), 294, *295*
So Dear to My Heart (1948), 180
Soderbergh, Steven, 276, 470

So Ends Our Night (1941), 134, 172
So Evil My Love (1948), 402
Somewhere in the Night (1946), 183
Sondheim, Stephen, 54
Song of the South (1946), 180
Son of Paleface (1952), 418
Sonovox, 276, 320
So Proudly We Hail (1943), 150, 250
Sorry, Wrong Number (1948), 89–90, 382, 385; adaptation problems, 231–36; auditory flashbacks, 233; backstory through flashbacks, 232–33; flashbacks and character shading, 233–34; flashbacks restricted to recounting character, 233, 236; opening and closing shots of telephone, *236*; restricted point of view, 444
So This Is New York (1948), 425
sound, coming of, to cinema, 8–10; and restriction of filmmaking to sound stages and backlots, 343–44
sound cutting, 110–11
sound montages, in radio, 53, 239
Sound of Fury, The (1950), 134–35, 390, 458, 472
sound technology: development of, 238–39; multiple-track recording, 286; postdubbing, 343; synchronization, 286
Source Code (2011), 470
Sous le ciel de Paris (1951), 467
Southerner, The (1945), 248
Soviet montage, 431
"specials" (films with $3 to $4 million budgets), 21
Specter of the Rose (1946), 294
Speedy (1928), 343
Spellbound (1945), 69, 313–18, 321, 374, 383; dream sequence, *275*, *317*, 450; ellipsis, 207; integration of suspense thriller with talking cure, 446; optical POV shots, *317*
Spiegel, Sam, 32
Spielberg, Steven, 17
Spiral Staircase, The (1946), *285*, 293, 383, 425
Spottiswoode, Raymond, *Grammar of the Film* (1935), 430
Stagecoach (1939), 11, 58, 166
Stage Fright (1950), 92, 101, 466
Stalling, Carl, 414
Stallings, Laurence, *The Streets Are Guarded* (1944 play), 357–58
Stand by for Action (1943), 148
Stand-In (1937), 426
Stanley and Livingston (1939), 240, 510n10
Stanwyck, Barbara, 217
Star Dust (1940), 426
Star Is Born, A (1937), 426
stars, of 1940s: as directors, 27; images, and characterization, 217–18; independent companies, 28; pace of work, 22, 24; standard pay for first-tier, 21
Star-Spangled Rhythm (1943), 427
Star Wars (1977), 472
State Fair (1945), 11, 293
Steel Trap, The (1952), 172
Steinbeck, John, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939 novel), 351
Stern, Philip Van Doren, "The Man Who Never Was" (1945 story), 370
Stevenson, Robert Louis, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886 novella), 377, 389
Stewart, Donald Ogden, 103, 514n26
Stewart, George R., *Storm* (1941 novel), 504n5
Stewart, James, 217
Stolen Life, A (1946), 319
story conferences, 33
Story of a Cheat, The (1936), 26
Story of G.I. Joe (1945), 149
Story of Three Loves, The (1953), 469
Story the Biograph Told, The (1904), 424
Stout, Rex, *How Like a God* (1929 novel), 49
Strange Affair of Uncle Harry, The (1945), 301–2, 330–31, 515n10
Strange Illusion (1945), 307–8, 465
Strange Impersonation (1946), 302, 330

Strange Interlude (1932), 51, 286
Strange Love of Martha Ivers (1946), 215
Stranger, The (1946), 457
Stranger on the Third Floor (1940), 57–*58*, 82, 278, 286–87, 304
Strangers on a Train (1951), 447
Stravinsky, Igor, 47
Strawberry Blonde (1941), 68, 87, 424
Streamline Express (1935), 166
stream of consciousness: in literature, 48–50, 103, 296; and personalized montage, in film, 296; in radio, 51, 277, 286, 290, 513n7, 514n24
Streetcar Named Desire, A (1952), 171
Street of Chance (1942), 282
Street of Memories (1940), 6
Street Scene (1931), 164–65, 170
Street with No Name, The (1948), 347
Strindberg, August, 47
Struggle, The (1932), 431
studio system. *See* Hollywood film industry, 1940s
Sturges, Preston, 11, 27, 28; abstract narrative architecture, 405; and artifice of Hollywood filmmaking, 404–15; blend of stage practices, traditional film conventions, and sound recording and mixing techniques, 404–5; and *Christmas in July* (1940), 405; dialogue *(répliques)*, 406–8; filmic self-consciousness, 409–11; and *The Great Moment* (1944), 70, 196, 327–28; "hooking" of dialogue, 407–8; in-jokes and gags, 34, 182, 436; and *Miracle of Morgan's Creek, The* (1944), 409, 526n7; monologues, 408–9; and "narratage" technique, 238, 240, 249–50, 410, 455; and physical comedy, 411; and *The Power and the Glory* (1933), 73–74, 405, 497n29; regard for history of film, 410–11, 436; *Sin of Harold Diddlebock, The* (1947; aka *Mad Wednesday*), 411, 437; sound-effect comedy, 411, 414; and *Unfaithfully Yours* (1948), 182, 183, 405, 411–15, 526n9. *See also specific films*
subjective narration: and flashbacks, 77, 101, 111, 122–23; in modernist literature, 49, 276; in pulp writing and radio drama, 276–77; in silent-era and 1930s films, 274–75; in turn-of-the-century novels, 48; voice-over, 57, 244, 260. *See also* moderate modernism
subjective narration, in film, 12, 43, 273–81, 325–26; auditory subjectivity, 280, 281–82, 294; bursts of within objective presentations, 277–78; dream sequences, 276, 299–308; hallucinations, 276, 278, 294; in horror films, 278; inner monologues, 276, 278, 279, 285–90; manipulation of information, 276; memory and imagination, 290–96, *293*; montage sequences, 295–96; musical scores and sound effects, 276; optical point-of-view (POV) shot, 195, 275, 276, 278, 279–*80*, 281–85, 290; perceptual subjectivity, 281–82
Sudden Fear (1952), 210–11
Suddenly, Last Summer (1960), 198
Sullavan, Margaret, 150
Sullivan, Hazel, 385
Sullivan's Travels (1942), 7, 405, 409–11, 436–37
Sunset Boulevard (1950), 30, 217, 434–44, 474; deceased main character, 252, 255–56, 325; direct address to the camera, 420
supernatural, humanizing of, 66
supernatural tales, 16
"super-Western," 11
Susan Slept Here (1954), 471
Suspect, The (1945), 215, 388–89
suspense: and broadening of knowledge, 448; Hitchcock's differentiation from surprise, 200, 445, 531n18

Suspense (radio program), 71, 379, 440, 445
suspense films. *See* mystery and suspense/thriller films
Suspicion (1941), 39, 216, 381, 442, 443, 530n6
Sward, Keith, 311
Swell Guy (1947), 219–20
"swing-shift matinees," 20
Swing Time (1936), 11
switcheroo, 40–41, 72, 464, 473

Take It or Leave It (1944), 426–27
Take One False Step (1949), 383
Tales of Manhattan (1942), 170, 177–78, *179*, 180, 203, 464, 466, 505n26–27
Tarantino, Quentin, 3, 180, 470
Taylor, Deems, *A Pictorial History of the Movies*, 429–30
Taylor, Robert, 345
Technicolor, 11
television, emergence of as film competitor, 23
temporal overlaps, 26
Ten Commandments, The (1923), 432
Tender Comrade (1944), 84
Tetzlaff, Ted, 28, 469
Thalberg, Irving, 164, 170
That Uncertain Feeling (1941), 297, 310
theater, moderate modernist: adaptation of works to film, 261–72; direct address to audience, 64; mainstreaming of avant-garde experiment, 49–50; techniques of flashbacks and fantasy episodes in 1940s, 262–63, 277
Theatricalism, 50, 53–54, 452, 532n37
theremin music, 276, 294, 354
They Came to Blow Up America (1943), 346
They Live by Night (1949), 402
They Shoot Horses, Don't They? (1969), 472
They Were Expendable (1945), 135
They Won't Believe Me (1947), 81, 383
Thief, The (1952), 469
Thing from Another World, The (1951), 520n42
Thin Man series, 372, 379
Thin Red Line, The (1998), 340, 473
13 Rue Madeleine (1947), 245–46, 346, 349
Thirty Seconds over Tokyo (1944), 147, 151
39 Steps, The (1935), 381
This Gun for Hire (1942), 217, 344, 381, 382
This Happy Breed (1944), 26
This Is the Army (1943), 22, 163
Thompson, Jim, *Nothing More Than Murder* (1949 novel), 72
Thompson, Kristin, 16, 127, 511n26
Thompson, Sadie, 41
Three Caballeros, The (1945), 181
Three Comrades (1938), 136
Three Faces of Eve, The (1957), 315
Three Girls about Town (1941), 136
Three Husbands (1950), 471
Three on a Match (1932), 136
Three Secrets (1950), 175, 203, 373
Three Smart Girls (1936), 136
Three Strangers (1946), 136, 185
Thru Different Eyes (1942), 92, 398
Thurber, James, 292
Tierney, Gene, 319
Tight Shoes (1941), 79
Till the Clouds Roll By (1947), 503n2
Till the End of Time (1946), 137–38, 352
Time of Your Life, The (1948), 171
Time Out for Romance (1937), 166
time travel, 357, 359
T-Men (1947), 347, 350
To Be or Not to Be (1942), 246
To Have and Have Not (1945), 95, 464
Tom, Dick, and Harry (1941), 305, 425
Too Late for Tears (1949), 402
Topper (1937), 365
Topper series, 358
Torn Curtain (1966), 448–49, 452
Touch of Evil (1958), 453
Tourneur, Jacques, 469

Tracy, Don: *Criss Cross* (1934 novel), 71, 277; *Round Trip* (1934 novel), 71
Traffic (2001), 470
transitions: hook, 211; and manipulation of narrative information, 212–14; single-shot, 270; surprise, 453; voice-over, 239
Travers, Henry, 216
Treadwell, Sophie, *Eye of the Beholder* (1919 play), 75
Treat, Lawrence, *V as in Victim* (1945 novel), 347
Trial, The (1962), 453, 454, 457
Trial of Mary Dugan, The (1941), 101, 208, 210
Trial of Vivienne Ware, The (1932), 68, 75
Trouble with Harry, The (1956), 446
Truffaut, François, 467–68, 468–69
Truly, Madly, Deeply (1990), 473
Trumbo, Dalton: *Johnny Got His Gun* (1939 novel), 276; and *Kitty Foyle* (1940), 103
Turim, Maureen, 69
Turnabout (1940), 358–59, 473
Turn Back the Clock (1933), 369
Turner, Lana, 169, 217
Tuttle, Frank, 402
Twain, Mark, *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, A* (novel), 359
Twelve Angry Men (1957), 471
Twelve O'Clock High (1950), 202
Twentieth Century (1934), 406
20th Century-Fox, 426
21 Grams (2003), 72
24 (television program), 470
Two-Faced Woman (1941), 319
Two Guys from Texas (1948), 305, *419*
Two Mrs. Carrolls, The (1947), 39, 287, 310, 382, 384
Two Much Johnson (1938), 437
Two Seconds (1932), 73
Tyler, Parker, 216, 273, 342–43; on narcissism of film industry, 416, 420, 426
Tynan, Kenneth, 532n37

Ultraism, 48, 50
Un carnet de bal (1937), 108–9
Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show (1902), 424
Under Capricorn (1949), 446
Undercurrent (1946), 383
Unfaithful, The (1947), 40, 216
Unfaithfully Yours (1948), 182; blending of theater, moving images, and sound, 411–15; modular construction, 412; "prospects," 412–13; recapitulation of earlier fantasies in slapstick, 413–14; sound gags, 414; suppressive narration to generate mystery, 412
Unfriended (2015), 470
Uninvited, The (1944), 374
Union Station (1950), 172, 446
Universal, 21, 27–28
Unsuspected, The (1947), 398–99
Up in Arms (1942), 305
Usual Suspects, The (1995), 474
Uzzell, Thomas H., *Narrative Technique*, 48

Vale, Eugene, *The Technique of Screenplay Writing*, 200–201, 245
Vance, Philo, 372
Van Dine, S. S., 413
Van Druten, John, 497n22
Vane, Sutton, 520n45
Variety, "H'wood's 'Offbeat' Prod. Trend," 469–70
Variety Girl (1947), *417*, 427
Velvet Touch, The (1948), 291
Verma, Neil, 71
Vernet, Marc, 312
Vertigo (1958), 452, 469; 1940s subjective devices, 450–51; variation of to-camera address, *449*
Vertov, Dziga, 428
Vidal, Gore, 16, 54
Vidor, Charles, 29
Vidor, King, 278–79, 427; and "thinking voice" treatment, 279
Villain Still Pursued Her, The (1940), 529n37

violence and sexual suggestion, increase in 1940s, 26
Virginia City (1940), 30
Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors (2000), 498n41
voice-over narration, 26, 52, 66; asymmetrical framing, 246–48; collaborative voice-overs, 250; in common-goal films, 147, 150–51; and control of sound by 1940, 239; cost-effectiveness, 241; and density of imagery and sound, 243–45; direct address, 63–66, 66, 192, 197, 240, 250–51, 282–*83*, 304, 420; entering into dialogue with characters, 420; external, 79, 241, 248, 347, 370; in films of 1940–41 flashback cycle, 240; "floating," 248–49; fresh treatment of in 1940s cinema, 103–6, 110–11, 237–38; by individual characters, 241; inner monologue as, 278, 286–87; "limited omniscient," 242–45; "narratage" technique, 238, 240, 249–50, 410, 455–56; no requirement for interlocutor, 245–46; novel narrators, 241; options, 12; posthumous narration, 252–360; in radio drama, 239; in 1930s films, 76, 238; and subjectivity, 57, 244, 260; and time layers, 241–45; uncertainty about narrator, 249
voice-over transitions, and film flashbacks, 239
Von Stroheim, Erich, 422
Vosper, Frank, 530n8

Wake Island (1942), 148
Waldman, Diane, 443
Walk a Crooked Mile (1948), 347, 428
Walk in the Sun, A (1946), 151, 152, 246
Wallace, Edgar, 380, 442
Wallace, Richard, 444
Wallis, Hal, 28, 44, 90
Wallis, J. H., *Once Off Guard* (1942 novel), 515n11
Walsh, Raoul, 427
Wanger, Walter, 28, 47
Ward, Mary Jane, *The Snake Pit* (1948 novel), 72, 352
war economy: and quota policy for film set materials, 344; shift to in late 1930s, 20
war films. *See* combat films
Warner, Harry, 29
Warner, Jack, 32
Warner Bros.: *Happy Times and Jolly Moments*, 433; Lemp family series, 140; writers, 33
Warren, Robert Penn, adaptation of 1946 novel *All the King's Men* into play, 71, 496n21
Waterloo Bridge (1931, 1940), 69, 82, 291
Waugh, Hillary, *Last Seen Wearing . . .* (1952), 347
Wayne, John, 217
Week-End at the Waldorf (1945), 168–69, 418
Weill, Kurt, 313
Well, The (1951), 386
Welles, Orson, 174–75; "Algiers" (1938), 239; and amnesia device, 454; beginning of film with prologue, 457–58; and *Citizen Kane*, 78, 80, 310; on collaborative competition in the commissary, 31–32; deep-focus and long takes, 13; detachment of sound from image, 456; experimentation, 27; and external, noncharacter narration, 455; first-person singular trademark, 454, 460; *Fountain of Youth* (1956 television pilot), 456; identification with voice-over narration, 454–55; inside jokes, 436; and low-angle and deep-focus shot design, 454; as master of adjacent media, 440; and "narratage" technique, 455–56; newcomer in 1940s, 28; peripatetic and undisciplined, 440–41; as public performer, 441; regard for history of film,

436; 1940s conventions in films, 453–54; Shakespeare adaptations, 440; shock effects in films, 453; on *Stagecoach* (1939), 529n45; stories inside stories, 457–60; study of film history, 437; and Threatricalist aesthetic, 452–53. *See also specific films*
Welles, Orson, plays: *Danton's Death* (1936), 453; *Horse Eats Hat* (1936 play), 453; *Julius Caesar* (1937), 50, 452, 453; *Macbeth* (1936 play), 453; *Marching Song* (juvenile play), 498n34, 498n36; *Native Son* (1941), 453, 526n3
Welles, Orson, radio dramas, 452; "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" (1940), 497n32; "Dracula" (1938), 51, 75, 497n32; first-person singular, 239, 286; flashbacks in, 71; "The Hurricane" (1939), 497n32; layered sound backgrounds in, 239; multiple storytellers in, 75; radio adaptation of *Rebecca*, 239–40; as voices in, 456; "The War of the Worlds" (1938), 51
Welles, Orson, unfinished films, 461; *The Dreamers*, 455, 457; *Heart of Darkness*, 51, 75, 250, 282, 452–53, 454–55, 457, 460; *It's All True* (unfinished documentary), 178; *The Other Side of the Wind*, 455, 457
Wells, H. G., 359
We're Not Married (1952), 176
West Germany, screening of Hollywood wartime films, 466–67
Westlake, Donald, 382
Wharton, Edith, *The Writing of Fiction*, 48
What Makes Sammy Run (1941), 41
What Price Glory? (1927), 148
What Price Hollywood? (1932), 426
Wheat and Tares (1915), 425
Where Danger Lives (1950), 284–85
Where Do We Go from Here? (1945), 359
Where Eagles Dare (1969), 473
Where the Sidewalk Ends (1950), 208–10, *209*, 215, 390–91, 399
Whiplash (1948), 155–56, 157, 158–59
Whirlpool (1950), 318–19, 402, 517n28
Whistle at Eaton Falls, The (1951), 346
White, Ethel Lina, *Her Heart in Her Throat* (1942 novel), 378
White Cliffs of Dover, The (1944), 84–85
White Heat (1948), 134, 387
Widmark, Richard, 217
Wilde, Oscar: and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 422; "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" (1891 short story), 179
Wilde, Percival: *Design for Murder* (1941 novel), 174; *Inquest* (1940 novel), 174
Wilder, Billy, 27, 28, 33, 34, 252, 402, 445, 511n22
Wilder, Thornton, 50; *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927 novel), 167; endorsement of rewrite of *Our Town* film, 61, 63; *The Long Christmas Dinner* (1931 play), 49; *Our Town* (1938 play), 54, 59, 64, 66, 71, 261; *Pullman Car Hiawatha* (1931 play), 64; *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942 play), 357
Williams, Ben Ames, *Leave Her to Heaven* (1944 novel), 72
Williams, Emlyn, *Night Must Fall* (1935 play), 380, 381
Williams, Roy, 469
Williams, Tennessee, 16; *The Glass Menagerie* (1945 play), 54, 71, 262; *The Purification* (1940 play), 277; *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947 play), 262; *Summer and Smoke* (1948 play), 262
Wilson, Mitchell, 379, 385, 387, 444, 445; *The Panic-Stricken* (1946), 432
Winchester '73 (1950), 177
Window, The (1949), 377, 447, 469
Wing and a Prayer (1944), 35–39, *36*, 41, 42–43, 45, 477; progenitor of, 38–39
Wings (1927), *38*–39, 45

Winsor, Kathleen, *Forever Amber* (1944 novel), 26
Wisdom of Eve, The (radio play), 190–91
Wise, Robert, 28, 159, 161, 402
Without Reservations (1946), 429
Witness Chair, The (1936), 76, 77
Wizard of Oz, The (1939), 299–301, 358, 472; "day residue" dreaming, 300; dream as plot parallel to surroundings, 300–301
Wodehouse, P. G., *Laughing Gas* (1936 novel), 520n43
Wolf Man, The (1941), 208
Wolf of Wall Street, The (2013), 474
Woman Disappeared, A (*Une femme disparaît*, 1942), 465
Woman in Hiding (1950), 255, 402
woman-in-peril plot, 228–31, 381, 382–83, 387–88, 392–93, 394, 398, 401, 444
Woman in Question, The (1950), 466
Woman in the Window, The (1944), 212–14, 301–2, 330, 476, 515n11
Woman in White, The (1948), 207, 382
Woman on the Beach (1947), 374
Woman on Trial, The (1927), 72
Woman's Face, A (1941), 68, 69, 77, 81
women, cultural stereotypes of, and flashback exploration, 102–23
Women, The (1939), 52, 202
women's literature, middlebrow, 140
Wonder Bar (1934), 165
Wood, Sam, 27
Woolf, Virginia, 47, 48, 54; *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925 novel), 49, 50, 164
Woolrich, Cornell, 53, 70, 382, 467, 468–69; *The Black Path of Fear* (1944 novel), 331; *The Bride Wore Black* (1940 novel), 174; *The Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1945 novel), 174; *Phantom Lady* (1942 novel), 397
Words and Music (1948), 251, 503n2
World Premiere (1941), 426
Wright, Richard, *Black Boy* (1945 novel), 352
Writer, The (journal), 200
writers: as producers, 27; as solid "constructionists," 125; struggle to get screen credit, 34; teams, 34
Writers Guild, contract of 1942, 33–34
writers' manuals, 48
Wrong Man, The (1957), 446, 447, 448
Wuthering Heights (1939), 69, 87, 123, 240
Wyler, William, 27, 28, 402

Yankee Doodle Dandy (1943), 11, 57, 503n2
Yank in Burma, A (1942), 288
Yerby, Frank, *The Vixens* (1947 novel), 352
"You Can't Fool a Camera" (MGM, 1941), 431
Young and Innocent (1937), 381
Young Man with a Horn (1950), 215, 251
Young Tom Edison (1940), 57
You Only Live Once (1937), 212, 429
Youth Runs Wild (1944), 346, 425
You've Got Mail (1998), 473

Zanuck, Darryl F., 32, 462; and *All About Eve*, 195–97; began career as scriptwriter for *Rin Tin Tin*, 433; belief that films should move quickly, 518n9; cycle of "journalistic features," 345; on film market in 1940s, 22; on *How Green Was My Valley*, 237; and *how* of storytelling, 2, 45, 470; on Joseph Mankiewicz, 183, 184; and *Laura*, 39, 259, 274; and *Leave Her to Heaven*, 70; and *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949), 184, 185, 506nn11–12; *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck: The Golden Years at Twentieth Century-Fox*, vii; and reworking of earlier devices, 39; and *The Snake Pit*, 323
Zinnemann, Fred, 28, 402
Zola, Émile, 504n5